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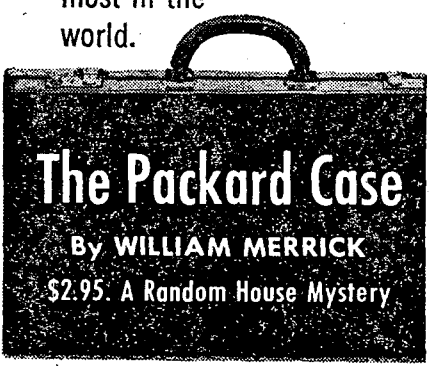

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Need more be said than —
Hildegarde Withers is back in a brand-new story!

WHO IS SYLVIA?

by STUART PALMER

"DON'T SAY IT!" CRIED MISS WITHERS from the doorway. "I'll concede that my new hat looks like something designed by a trained chimpanzee using finger-paints, and that I burst into your sanctum sanctorum unannounced, but your outer office was empty and you *did* send for me! You have a *problem,* Oscar. Right?"

"My worst immediate problem," grinned the long-suffering Inspector past his inevitable cigar, "is a sudden ringing of the ears. But sit down, Hildegarde."

She was already sitting, on the edge of a hard chair. "You want my help on a new murder case—I hope?"

This all happened, it might be explained, back in the halcyon days when Miss Withers was still teaching school in Manhattan and devoting a good deal of her spare time to acting as self-appointed gadfly to the police department, especially Homicide.

Oscar Piper shook his head. "It isn't murder—at least, not yet."

"But it involves a recent appointment with a charming feminine visitor. You got a haircut, and you are wearing what looks suspiciously like a new tie. And there is the faint aroma of expensive perfume in the office, and a lipstick-stained cigarette in your ashtray. What did your fair visitor want that you wouldn't give her?"

"Now, how in the world—?"

"Elementary, my dear Oscar. I think I passed her in the hall, looking madder than a wet hen. A smallish woman in black, with pearls under a mink-trimmed Alaska fur-seal jacket, fighting the Battle of the Forties, heart-shaped face, determined chin?"

"That's Mrs. Lola Mills. A wealthy socialite, has her own antique and *décor* shop up on Madison. Sent down to me by the Commissioner himself. Wanted to have her new daughter-in-law arrested and deported so that the wedding can be quietly annulled."

"That's *all* she wanted?"

"Yeah. I gave her the polite brush-off by sending her down to look through the mug files. You see, Mrs. Mills is convinced that her precious son Donald has gotten himself married to Miss Lizzie Borden—"

"Oscar! Have you been *drinking?*"

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"No, but it's a dandy idea. I was going to say—to Miss Lizzie Borden, or a reasonable accurate facsimile thereof. Anyway, an adventuress, Mrs. Mills says, traveling under an assumed name because she is wanted by the police somewhere, who married a rich playboy for his money and is probably planning to poison him at any moment. Not a case for the department."

"Naturally not. You're never interested in murders until *after* they happen. But I happen to be a firm believer in preventive detection. What grounds has this Mrs. Mills for her suspicions, or is she just being a mother-in-law? Tell me more, I'm all ears."

The Inspector carefully relighted his cigar. "I don't know if the woman has any real basis for worry or not. But her son came into a pile of dough from his late father, and took off on a round-the-world yacht cruise with some friends. The cruise broke up in the Mediterranean and Donny went on catch-as-catch-can, probably seeing the world through the bottom of a highball glass. On the last leg of the trip, between Hawaii and the mainland, he met a girl—and married her as soon as they hit Frisco.

"So he brings his bride back to mother's big duplex apartment on East Seventy-third, where I gather that three's a crowd. The girl is an oddball, according to Mrs. Mills. Secretive about her past, seems to have no family or background, didn't want any wedding announcements sent out, and refuses to have her picture taken."

"Many woman don't think they're photogenic," Miss Withers said. "Even I—but no matter. There must be more than *that*."

"There is. The girl claims to be an American citizen, but at times of stress she lapses into a British or Australian accent. What else? Oh, yes. Likes to cook, and dabbles in rare herbs. And about the only personal possession she has that predates the marriage is a sort of dispatch case, a big leather bag that she keeps locked in a closet and guards with her life."

"Oscar, I'm very much afraid that Mrs. Mills was once frightened by that old Broadway play, *Night Must Fall,* where the menace carries around a leather hatbox with his latest victim's head in it. Surely the situation could be cleared up with a few simple questions—?"

"I gather from Lola Mills that things are too strained for that. She's afraid that if she pries any more, her son will blow up and take off and she'll never see him again. He's on the defensive, completely infatuated with the girl."

"So he's in love with his own wife! Oscar, I'd like to give this Mrs. Lola Mills a piece of my mind."

"Believe it or not, I may ask you to do just that little thing. But first tell me one thing. Did you phone Missing Persons about a week ago

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in regard to a girl named—let me see—Sally Burris? And if so, why?"

"Because she seems to have disappeared into thin air. You see, I had a letter from a Max Bailey, now a real estate man in Hawaii. He used to be a pupil of mine—I keep in touch with a number of them. I remember Maxie as a little urbin who usually needed a handkerchief, but he seems to have grown up and fallen in love. He and this Sally Burris had an understanding, he wrote me. But the girl was stage-struck, and she left Honolulu and headed for this city, where she had reservations at the Equity Club, a residence hall for young actresses and dramatic students."

"I know the place. The Martha Washington with make-up kits."

"But Sally never showed up there, not even to ask for her fifty dollar deposit back or to pick up her mail. Max's letters have gone unanswered. Only the next-of-kin can report a person as officially missing—but the girl is an orphan. Max is worried, and so am I now. Oscar, has something dreadful happened?"

The Inspector looked very pleased with himself. "Well, she's not on a slab in the Morgue—if that's what you mean. Stop trying to be the Little White Mother of all the Russias, will you? I'm afraid you have some bad news for your former pupil, that's all. Hildegarde, it seems that for once instead of getting into my hair, you've taken me off the hook."

"And just how, pray tell?"

"It wasn't until after Mrs. Mills had flounced out of here that I remembered something—the similarity of names between your Sally Burris and her son's new wife, Sylvia Burris. Sally being the diminutive of Sylvia, naturally."

Miss Withers's eyes widened. "Why, Oscar! How neat!"

"Yeah. Nothing has happened to Max's girl friend except that she's jilted him and married somebody else. And Lola Mills has got herself in a stew about nothing. All the same, she'll take some persuading, the mood she's in. Did this Max Bailey give you some description of his Sally?"

"He said she is delectable and curvaceous, and I quote, 'With eyes like stars!'"

Oscar Piper snorted. "That's a description?"

"Weren't you ever young, Oscar, back around the turn of the century?"

"And look who's talking!"

"Max also enclosed a snapshot." Miss Withers produced it.

"Just another pretty girl at the beach," said the Inspector. "A bandanna around her hair, dark sunglasses. The picture's not quite in focus, but definitely a dish. I might even say—"

"Stop drooling! I also saw Sally's application form at the Equity Club, in which she says that she's twenty-four, five-seven, a hundred and twenty-five pounds, white, American, and a graduate of Hono-

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lulu High. Acting experience includes road shows, repertory, and stock. References were a theatrical agent named Moske and the aforesaid Mr. Bailey."

"Good. With that information we ought to be able to set Mrs. Mills's mind at rest. Maybe she won't be happy about her son's marrying an actress, but it's better than a fugitive from justice. Wait a minute, I'll see if the woman is still downstairs looking at pictures." He pressed a button on his squawk-box, spoke briefly, and then turned back, shaking his head. "She seems to have got tired of barking up that tree, and walked out."

Miss Withers was stalking uneasily up and down the office. "She probably decided to take matters into her own hands. Oscar, I smell trouble—the woman sounds desperate—"

"Oh, come now. Your imagination is working overtime again."

"And one of the things Mrs. Mills hasn't stopped at is petty theft, if I'm not mistaken!" The schoolteacher pointed. "Oscar, when the woman was here earlier this afternoon did you happen to leave her alone in the office for a moment, and at that time was your prize trophy in its usual place of honor there on the shelf?"

The Inspector jumped up, staring at a very empty little plush-lined case. "My silver-mounted Grussbacher Positive that I won at the Pistol Team tournament in Boston eighteen years ago! Why, that no-good, light-fingered—" He grabbed for the phone, crimson with fury.

"Wait!" Miss Withers commanded. "*Please* let me handle this, Oscar. Remember, the woman has influence with the Commissioner. And you don't want it known that a visitor stole a lethal weapon right out from under your nose." She snatched up her umbrella and handbag, and headed for the door. "I'll rush up there and straighten things out before she gets into trouble with your pistol."

"*Women!*" snorted Inspector Piper, his eyes traveling ceilingward.

The languid young man behind the apartment house desk asked who was calling, and she said "Miss Withers, from Inspector Piper's office at Headquarters!"—which in one sense was true. Up on the 30th floor a massively carved oak door was opened by a young woman wearing a gingham apron and a wary expression, who said "Yes?"

"Will you please tell your mistress—" then Miss Withers bit her tongue. This was not the maid; her apron was too functional, her bearing too unmaidlike. "Excuse me, I was looking for Mrs. Mills."

"*I'm* Mrs. Mills." The girl wore no lipstick, no make-up except possibly eye-shadow. A large diamond solitaire and diamond wedding ring were in evidence. "I fancy you want my husband's mother, Mrs.

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Lola Mills. She hasn't come home yet."

"Thank heaven for that!" murmured Miss Withers. She found herself being ushered into a drawing room only slightly smaller than a tennis court, decorated with a lavish simplicity. There were some weird, avant-garde paintings, and a number of leering African witch-doctor masks. But the schoolteacher had eyes only for the girl. "You must be Sally?"

"I—I've been called that. But I'm Mrs. Donald Mills—Sylvia Mills." The voice was cool, aloof. "Will you excuse me? I have something on the stove." The young woman swept out, rather like a duchess in spite of the apron. Miss Withers chose the least unfriendly-looking chair, completely at a loss. For the life of her she could not decide if this was the girl in Maxie Bailey's snapshot, or not!

She seemed taller than five feet seven, slimmer than a hundred and twenty-five pounds, older than twenty-four. Miss Withers took another hasty look at the picture, wishing it were in better focus. It *could* have been she, if that was black hair under the bandanna, and if those were blue eyes under the sun-glasses. Still . . .

In a matter of minutes Sylvia was back, bearing a silver tray. "Would you like a cup of tea, maybe with a spot of rum in it? Or a cocktail? Or perhaps you're not supposed to drink on duty."

"Er—why, no thank you. Tea would be just fine."

The young woman poured, with a studied graciousness. But for all her poise, Miss Withers sensed that Sylvia was tight as an E-string.

A frontal approach seemed best. "You're a long way from home, aren't you, my dear?" Hildegarde asked chattily.

Sylvia put on a wistful Katharine Cornell expression. "Home? I never really had one."

"I was only referring to the charming trace of accent. Isn't it Australian?" This was purely a shot in the dark; Sylvia's speech was without ethnological overtones, almost carefully so.

"Oh? Why, yes, I have traveled down-under. But I didn't know any of it had rubbed off. The Aussies myke an 'abit of dropping their haitches, as the saying goes." Sylvia smiled faintly.

"And you like to cook? How unusual for a young girl nowadays!"

"Oh, sometimes I like to mess around a bit in the kitchen with rare herbs and spices. Perhaps because for so many years I never had anything but an electric plate. My mother-in-law thinks it's odd of me, but then she thinks everything about me is odd." The dark-shadowed eyes narrowed a little. "I suppose that's why she sent for somebody from the police to ask me personal questions. Oh, don't bother to deny it. She even tried to have me tailed by private detectives!"

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Miss Withers hastily took in sail. "I am neither a policewoman nor a private investigator," she announced. "You don't have to fence with me, my dear. I was asked to look you up and see if you were all right—by a young man in Hawaii, a former pupil of mine. Of course you remember Max?"

The blue eyes flickered, but there was only the faintest hesitation. "Max Bailey? Poor dear, I'm afraid I have been too busy to send him a card. But he was never anything to me, I assure you. Oops—excuse me again." Sylvia made another quick exit to the kitchen, eventually returning to say, "Just didn't want my *Boeuf Galouette* to burn. Now, about Mr. Bailey. I think he has his nerve, asking you to spy on me!"

"I'll be glad to tell him so, and report that you are happily married. You are happy, aren't you? In spite of this situation with your mother-in-law?"

"What makes you think there is a situation? What did she tell you?"

"I've never met Mrs. Mills. But she talked to the Inspector, who happens to be one of my oldest friends. I promised him I'd look into it. As far as I can see, your mother-in-law is just a little upset because you seem so—well, so secretive. For some reason she seems to think that you're not what you say you are—"

"Well, that's just too bad! I'm Sylvia Burris, born at sea twenty-five years ago on the American passenger-cargo ship *Victoria Reina,* graduated from Honolulu High seven years ago last June, girls' basketball team, French club, second lead in class play. My parents died in the bombing of Singapore, and I was brought up by various relatives also now dead." She was rattling it off as if by rote.

"Have you ever used any other name?"

Sylvia's laugh was quick. "Various stage names, which is quite natural around the theater. I was Sally Sims on a U.S.O. tour. My life has been full of ups and downs, and there are some things—"

"Things you can't or won't talk about?"

"Well, my husband knows all he needs to know, and he's satisfied! I didn't marry his damn mother, too! I guess you mean well, Miss Whatever-your-name-is, but I'm sick and tired of being pried at and questioned. Now that's all—I really must get back to the kitchen." The girl started out, then paused in the doorway for an exit line. "Tell Lola Mills I just want to be left alone."

Miss Withers frowned, sipping her tea. It was hard to imagine Mata Hari in an apron—yet there was something strange about the girl. She seemed to be hiding inside some sort of shell . . .

Just at that moment there came the click of a key, and there entered a very handsome gray Cheviot topcoat and ultra-smart bowler hat. At least that was the way Miss Withers

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would have described it, for the man inside the garments was a trifle on the vague side. "What a tremendous personality he *needs!*" she quoted to herself. But Donald Mills slipped out of his coat, hanging it and the hat meticulously in the hall closet, and then turned to cry, "Sylvia? Sylvia doll?"

And Sylvia came running, arms outstretched. Their embrace would have been cut out of the film by most movie censors. Then the young man announced breathlessly, "Darling, I got the reservations! Just think, by this time tomorrow —"

But Sylvia nudged him. "Donny, this lady is from the police." And Donny paled visibly.

"Nothing very serious," Miss Withers spoke up quickly. "Just something about your mother's antique shop. Shoplifting, we think." She gave Sylvia a meaningful look.

"Oh," said Donny, immediately disinterested. Suddenly he turned to Sylvia, who was silently waiting. "Doll, what say you get changed and we shake the dust of this dump off our feet and go out somewhere gay for dinner?"

"But—but I was making *Boeuf Galouette* to surprise you!"

Donny lowered his voice, but not quite low enough. "Come on, we can't take another evening *en famille,* you know that! Mother will have the vapors when I tell her we're leaving."

"Of course, dear. I'll put the stuff in the fridge and slip into a posh frock in 'arf-a-mo!" She rushed off to the kitchen, rattled pots and pans for a moment, then came back to parade up the stairs with her husband.

"My mother should be back soon," said the young man over his shoulder, quite without warmth. "Make yourself at home."

As soon as the young couple was out of sight. Miss Withers made herself at home by casing the hall closet; she had noticed a suspicious bulge in the pocket of Donald Mills's topcoat. Yes, the bulge was a snub-nosed Savage .32 automatic. There was also an envelope from a travel agency, with two first-class airline tickets to Guatemala City via Mexico.

She put everything back where she had found it, returned to her chair, and picked up a book. She was just in time, for Donny Mills suddenly ran down the stairs, a scowl on his vaguely handsome face.

"I know why you're here," he said sharply. "Shoplifting my eye! As if anybody could walk off with one of my mother's Governor Winthrop desks." He snorted. "Mother hired you to come here and smear Sylvia!"

"Young man, I am only trying—"

"My mother would stop at nothing, literally nothing, to break up my marriage! She's a monomaniac! She's an incubus!"

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"I'm not too well versed in demonology, but don't you mean succubus?"

He wasn't listening. "I've had enough! That's why we're getting out, for good. Because if we don't, something terrible is going to happen!"

"Then you feel that your wife is actually in danger?"

"We all are!" Donny crossed to the little bar and tossed off a jigger of brandy. "So you can tell my dear mother for me—" He broke off as Sylvia appeared at the head of the staircase. Her dark hair was coiffed, and she was molded into a long, high-fashion black evening gown which did things for her, as did the mutation-mink coat. Yet Miss Withers could only think of Vampira on television, or the woman in the wonderful Charles Addams drawings.

And then Sylvia caught one of her spike heels on the stair, and started to tumble. Donny, a trifle slow in his reflexes, just barely managed to catch her in his arms.

It was over in a moment. And it all seemed a little unreal to Miss Withers, who rose as they prepared to leave. "Perhaps I should be running along . . . ?"

Donny Mills shook his head. "No, you may as well wait. You can break the news to my mother that we're leaving." And the door slammed behind them.

"Well, really!" said the schoolteacher to herself. Then she went over to the phone and dialed Spring 7-3100. Luckily the Inspector was still at his office. He sounded worried. "Well, Hildegarde?"

"Not so well. I'm at the Mills apartment, but Lola has not come home. I met the young couple, but since I have no badge or official status—"

"I'm glad you realize that. But is the girl Sally Burris from Honolulu, or isn't she?"

"I can't ask questions and demand answers, as you policemen can. There's something about the girl that doesn't ring quite true. She's putting on an act of some kind. Her speech is guarded, though she did lapse once or twice into what I imagine to be Australian slang. Sylvia *could* be Sally—she did recognize the name Max Bailey. But Oscar, I can't for the life of me decide if she is really the girl in the snapshot or not."

"When you're undecided about anything, that's news!"

"Thank you. Oscar, I wish you'd check and see if Donald Mills has a pistol permit—because if not, he's violating the Sullivan Act."

"This is all I need!" yelped Oscar Piper. "Lola Mills has a gun and she thinks Sylvia is going to try to kill Donny, and Donny has a gun and he thinks his mother is going to try to kill Sylvia, and—"

"Nobody is going to kill anybody!" interrupted the schoolteacher sharply. "I shall see to that. I'll confront Mrs. Mills when she ar-

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rives and straighten this whole thing out in no time at all, even if I have to commit a technical misdemeanor. Don't worry, Oscar."

"'Don't worry, Oscar' my foot! You're sitting on the lid of a volcano, and I'm to wait and cool my heels until the whole thing blows up in the newspapers tomorrow! Remember, I'm up before the retirement board in a month or so!"

"Take a couple of aspirins, my dear," said Miss Withers, and hung up. Then she sat herself down to wait with all the patience of a cat at a mousehole.

Lola Mills did not arrive home until well after eight thirty, and when the intense, birdlike little woman did put in an appearance the odor of cognac was mingled with her perfume. Nor did the enameled perfection of her still-beautiful face crack into any surprise at the presence of an uninvited visitor. But of course the man at the desk downstairs must have tipped her off.

"The Inspector sent you? How thoughtful of the dear man!"

"It's about the pistol," said Miss Withers bluntly.

"What pistol?"

The schoolteacher sternly said exactly what pistol, and Lola Mills said loftily that the whole idea was quite preposterous and that she would be glad to lay bare the contents of her handbag or submit to search. "So you simply checked the gun at the desk downstairs when you heard somebody from the police was here! No matter—but do you mind telling me how you were planning to use it?"

Lola Mills smiled coldly. "Conceding nothing—but mightn't such a weapon just possibly be useful to *force* the truth out of somebody?"

"I've met your daughter-in-law, and I doubt if she'd scare easily. The Inspector has told me all about your problem—"

"Oh, I do hope that you're not one of those private eyes! I've tried them, and they got nowhere. Except to find out that there once actually was a Burris girl who went to high school in Honolulu. Only the description doesn't fit my son's wife at all!" When shown the snapshot, Lola Mills laughed in derision. "The woman my son married is thirty if she's a day—she's no sweet high school graduate!"

Miss Withers doubted if her own high school graduation picture would be identifiable today, but this situation was beyond further argument. "I'm going to nip this in the bud, Mrs. Mills. Obviously there is only one way to set your mind at rest. Where's this mysterious leather bag that Sylvia's supposed to keep hidden?"

"Upstairs, in her closet. But—you wouldn't *dare!*" Lola Mills was suddenly cold sober.

"Your son and his wife are out for the evening. Now is the time. And I'll venture to bet that the bag contains only keepsakes of her child-

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hood, or perhaps old family photographs and dance programs or something equally harmless. And I want your promise that if I'm right you'll stop trying to play the serpent in this Eden of theirs."

"But you don't understand!" cried Mrs. Mills as she led the way up the stair. "Nothing in the world would make me happier than to have Donny safely, happily married. But he was tired of the nice girls in his own set before he was twenty. He got mixed up with an awful girl in the Village who wrote bad poetry to be read aloud to the music of a three-man orchestra, and then there was that Mexican lady bullfighter, and I had to buy off that dancer from Cairo . . . But *this!*"

They came into a large bedroom, designed as a man's room but now showing a considerable overlay of feminine frippery. There were books—expensive, beautifully bound esoterica, Mirabeau, Verlaine, Huysmans. There was a massive hi-fi set, its records running largely to "progressive" jazz and atonal, Oriental stuff. But both books and records were now almost snowed under with copies of *Playbill* and *Theater Arts*.

Lola Mills was trying to find a key that would fit the closet. "Try your own," suggested Miss Withers. And it worked, after some jiggling. Then, from behind a mountain of brand-new feminine apparel, from the darkest recesses of the cubicle, the two women lugged out a worn, very heavy leather case and placed it on the bed.

"You'll notice that she's scraped most of the labels off, but you can still see most of the word 'Melbourne,'" Mrs. Mills pointed out accusingly.

"The girl admits having traveled in Australia." Miss Withers squinted at the lock, then attacked it cautiously, using a bent bobby-pin. "Mustn't leave any scratches," she pointed out. "Now if I can only —*there!*"

The case suddenly flew open, its contents spread out before them. "Just as I said!" announced the schoolteacher with heartfelt relief. "Nothing but a lot of old scrapbooks and newspapers."

But then they looked a little more closely . . .

"It's happened!" was Miss Withers's greeting to the Inspector as he arrived at Centre Street next morning.

"Not a murder? *Who? Where?*"

"A man named Paul Hykes, in a suburb of Sydney, Australia, almost five years ago. I'd have phoned and got you up in the middle of the night to come down here, only I knew that probably you couldn't get Australia on the phone at that hour, so—"

"I don't want to get Australia on the phone at any hour!" The veteran policeman sat himself heavily down behind his desk. "Don't come

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at me so fast with all this before I've even had coffee! Hildegarde, what have you got into?"

"Believe it or not, Lola Mills seems to have been perfectly justified in her suspicions. Poor woman. I had to call her doctor for a sedative, and then—"

"And you left her in that condition, *with my gun?*"

"Oh, never mind your old gun. Oscar, we burgled the lock of Sylvia's mysterious bag. From now on just call me Pandora!" And then she went on to tell him everything in detail.

"You mean to tell me that girl's bag was crammed with press clippings from Australian newspapers about some old murder case?"

"Yes. *And* the pistol, of course. A Korean war souvenir, of Chinese make. But the clippings were all about the murder by slow poison of a wealthy, retired sheep-man named Hykes, and the subsequent trial of his cook-housekeeper for the killing. Her name was Mullen—Sylvia Mullen."

"Sylvia!"

"'Who is Sylvia, what is she . . . ?' as the poet sang. I don't suppose you know anything about the case, but I saw enough in the scrapbooks to see that it must have been something of a *cause célèbre* down on the other side of the world. The Mullen girl, only twenty at the time, expected to inherit in her employer's will. There seems to have been a good deal of public sympathy for her, as there often is when the accused is young and attractive."

"She was acquitted?"

"I didn't get to read that far. Lola Mills was practically in hysterics, and I was afraid that Sylvia and Donny would come home and catch us in the act. As it was, I had to spend the night with the poor woman, and the young couple didn't come home at all. Or at least not until after I'd made Lola some coffee this morning and deposited her at her antique shop."

Oscar Piper was very grave. "And to think that I gave Mrs. Mills the brush-off. I don't suppose there's the slightest doubt that the girl is the Australian poisoner? Any press photos?"

"Just one." She handed him a newsclip of an enlarged snapshot, not improved by newspaper processing, showing a girl in shirt and dungarees, and wearing large earrings. He scowled at it.

"Not much better than the one from Hawaii," admitted Miss Withers. "But there *is* a resemblance, allowing for the years, some dieting, and a smarter hairdo. Maybe if your lab would blow the pictures up big—"

He nodded. "You're right. I've got to call Sydney. If Sylvia Mullen was found guilty and executed, or if she's in prison somewhere, then okay. But if she got off, changed her last name, and sneaked out of the country—"

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"And assumed the identity of a young actress named Sally Burris—we musn't forget that angle."

"Yes. This may be murder on murder, with one more to go. Poisoners almost always repeat, if they get off the first time. Okay, here goes."

He picked up the phone, but it developed that all the radio-telephone circuits in the Pacific were fouled up by sunspots, and there would be at least a considerable delay.

"Then cable!" commanded the schoolteacher. "Remember, Sylvia and Donny have plane tickets for seven o'clock tonight. And if she once gets him out of the country—"

So the official query went out, addressed to a Chief Inspector of the New South Wales C.I.D.

"And while we're waiting, you could check on passports," Miss Withers prodded hopefully. The Inspector objected that the girl wouldn't need a passport traveling from Hawaii to the United States. "But Oscar, she would on arriving in *Guatemala*."

There was no record of a passport issued to a Sylvia Burris. But a passport had been issued four days ago to a Sylvia Mills.

"With that, they can go anywhere!" Oscar Piper snapped. "Sylvia will have Donald Mills to herself down in one of the banana republics, where they never heard of a medical examiner, an autopsy or even extradiction!"

And the minutes ticked by—with deadline getting closer and closer.

Then, just as they were about to send out for their third jug of coffee, came Australia's answer. Sylvia Mullen had stood trial before the Assizes, and the jury had disagreed. Indictment finally nolprossed by the DPP. Failure to convict due to disagreement by forensic chemists about the poison, thought to be derived from a weed the natives called "pituri." In accordance with the laws of the Commonwealth, all pictures and fingerprints of the accused had been destroyed on her release. Present whereabouts unknown.

"I knew it in my bones!" said Miss Withers.

"Of which you have a complete set!" muttered the Inspector, quite ungallantly.

"This is no time for flattery, Oscar. You could send out a broadcast to have Sylvia arrested and held—"

"On what charge? We've no proof, even if we're morally sure that she murdered this Hykes, did away with Sally Burris, and now has her sights set for Donald Mills!"

"Oh, dear. And they did seem such a loving couple."

"Sylvia loves Donald Mills like a snake loves a bird," retorted Oscar Piper. "Did his mother tell you that right after the ceremony Sylvia got him to write a new will, and

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that he also made her his sole beneficiary?"

But the schoolteacher was studying the faded old newspaper photograph of the Australian Sylvia. "Imagine a girl having the bad taste to wear earrings with dungarees," she mused. "All the same, Oscar, I do wish you'd have somebody make an enlargement of this picture—the head, and especially the ear."

"Come off it! Even an amateur like you should know that Lombroso's theories about criminals having a special type of ear-lobe were exploded years ago!"

"I'm quite aware of that. I wasn't born yesterday."

"Nor day before yesterday, either! Oh, I get it. About the earring. But there's no reason to suppose the girl is wearing that same ornament after all these years, or even has it in her jewel case. You're grasping at straws—" Just then the phone rang, and he grabbed it eagerly. "It's Lola Mills," he said out of the side of his mouth—as if the shrill feminine accents did not echo halfway across the office. It was a very one-sided conversation, which he ended only by promising to call back. "More trouble," he sighed. "Mrs. Mills says she went back to the apartment at lunchtime and found that Donny and Sylvia had been there and gone, bag and baggage."

"*The* bag, too?"

"Yes. Not even a tender goodbye note from her son. The woman's desperate. I guess I ought to have her locked up, for her own protection."

"Thank heaven she doesn't know when and where they're leaving."

"She does. I guess she called all the airlines."

"Then I imagine," said the schoolteacher thoughtfully, "that Mama will make a point of being out at the airport to say goodbye—and not with bon voyage flowers."

Oscar Piper threw a perfectly good cigar into the wastebasket. "There's too many loose guns knocking around in this case! I've half a mind to have everybody picked up and charged with Sullivan Law violation."

"Which publicity should make the Commissioner very happy, to say nothing of your having to admit that one of the guns was stolen right out from under your nose."

"Yeah, that damn gun. I'm going to call Lola Mills and order her to bring it in . . ." But nobody answered at the Mills apartment. Nor was Lola Mills at her antique shop, though a clerk said he would be *delighted* to take a message . . .

The Inspector started to give him one, being pushed beyond his strength.

"Oscar, you should have your mouth washed out with soap," said the schoolteacher as she headed out of the office. "I'll see you at the airport, if not before."

"Last call! All passengers for

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Pan-American Airlines Flight Twelve, Mexico City and Guatemala City, now loading at Gate Three," came the booming, impersonal voice of the public address system, echoing hollowly through the dingy stone vaults of the air terminal at Idlewild—so-called because it is neither idle nor wild.

Inspector Oscar Piper waited helplessly beside a pillar, chewing one cigar after another into bits. He had arrived late because of a traffic foul-up on the Parkway. No sign of Hildegarde anywhere, no sign of Lola Mills. And no sign of the young couple, either—at least, of a couple who fitted the schoolteacher's somewhat sketchy descriptions: a young man in a bowler hat and Cheviot topcoat with a girl who looked a little like Vampira. Yet they could be anybody—almost all the passengers now boarding the vast, superscience-fiction jet that was poised outside in the dismal drift of rain seemed to be couples, half covered by umbrellas . . .

And the clock ticked inexorably away.

Finally Oscar Piper went outside and pressed his way to the wire barrier, checking on his aides. He had six plainclothes detectives, two of them women, planted at strategetic intervals. And a lot of good that would do him.

Mechanics were giving a last-minute touchup to the plane, the last of the baggage was being stowed in its cavernous belly, and the cargo hatch was slammed tight. And then, out of the blue, he heard his name called out over the loud speaker. "Will Inspector Piper please report to the Security Office on the mezzanine? Will Inspector Piper . . ." He raced inside and up the stairs.

Meanwhile Donald Mills and his adored Sylvia, who had come aboard separately, each wearing a raincoat, with the girl in slacks and a mannish hat, settled themselves back comfortably in two forward seats and caught the first relaxing breath of freedom. "I told you mother wouldn't pull anything," Donny whispered. "Didn't I?"

"It wasn't your mother I was so worried about," the girl whispered back. "It's that Withers woman. Donny, she has eyes just like a wombat back home, a *digger's* eyes." She broke off at the pained look on her husband's face. "Oh, there I go again! I'm sorry, dear."

"For God's sweet sake will you remember you're Sylvia Burris Mills, and that you were born on an American ship at sea and went to school in Hawaii?" he said intensely. "Never mind the past—it's over and done with! Darling, you *must* remember—"

He broke off as a shadow loomed overhead. "Mr. and Mrs. Mills?" The speaker wore an airlines uniform. "I wonder if you'd mind stepping off for a moment? Some

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mistake about your seats . . ." They froze. Yes, they would mind very much, but it was an order, not a request.

Up in the Security Office a troubled airlines official was shaking his head. "Inspector, I can't hold that flight any longer. Not unless you show me a warrant."

"We can show you more than that, young man," snapped Miss Hildegarde Withers, who now swept into the room like a ship under full sail—with Lola Mills in tow. "You wait right there in the chair," the schoolteacher told her. "And say nothing!"

Lola Mills nodded and sat down, surprisingly meek.

Miss Withers faced the airlines man. "If you give orders to send that plane off, I'll plant myself right in front of the nose and defy you to run over me!"

"She would, too," said the Inspector dryly, and the official mopped his forehead. Just at that moment Donald Mills and Sylvia were ushered into the room, the young man avoiding his mother's glance.

"I demand to know what this is all about!" Donny blustered. "What possible charges—?"

"Oh, be quiet!" the schoolteacher snapped. She caught the Inspector's arm and whispered to him fiercely. "Oscar, you'll have to trust me! Have I ever given you a—a bum steer?"

"Yes," he answered truthfully.

"But my average! Oscar, this is terribly important, and much bigger things than the letter of the law are involved. I think I have it solved. Just have the three of them sent into the inner office to us, one at a time . . ."

He hesitated—and was lost. Through his mind flashed memories of the dozens of times the intrepid, meddlesome old thresher had in the past swept aside the chaff and come to the wheat . . . And Oscar Piper nodded against his better judgement. He gave the orders, and then followed her into the other office, a bare little cubicle with only a desk, a filing cabinet, and two chairs. Nobody wanted to sit down, anyway.

"Lola Mills first," said Miss Withers.

"Yeah. But how did you get hold of her?"

"Lay in wait for her at her apartment. I knew she'd want to change into something modish for what she had in mind, so she'd have to go home before coming. Show her these enlargements, Oscar—and explain what they mean." She produced blowups of Sylvia Mullen's undisputed snapshot reproduced in the old Australian newspaper, and of the other. "Notice the ears, Oscar!"

And then, at long last, he saw what she was driving at. "Judas priest in a handbasket!" And his manner was very grave as Mrs. Mills came into the room. "Here is

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the evidence, Ma'am," he said gently. "Notice the ears?"

Lola Mills saw, and nodded slowly. Her eyes began to fill with mascara-stained tears, and she went silently out.

Donald Mills was next, his face dark with sullen fury, his eyes fearful. He had had about enough, he said.

"There is very little more," the schoolteacher told him. "It is out of my hands now, and a matter for the police. The Inspector just wants to ask you one question. Oscar?"

"Mr. Mills," asked Piper quietly, "have you ever seen the contents of your wife's dispatch case?"

There was a silence. Then "Yes!" cried Donny Mills. "You mean those old clippings? Well, why shouldn't my wife be interested in a big murder trial that took place when she was visiting in Australia? The similarity of first names, and of appearance and all that—why, my wife's always been interested in the theater, so she collected background material . . ." His voice trailed away as if he didn't expect anybody really to believe him.

"But do you actually know—" began the Inspector.

"I said *one* question, Oscar!" Miss Withers cut in. The Inspector felt the grip of her fingers on his arm.

Donny Mills, more bewildered than ever, turned and went out.

"But Hildegarde, we're supposed to be clearing up this mystery, and you won't let me—"

"Get Sylvia herself in here," said the schoolteacher. "Oscar, you've got to leave this to me, or it still can blow up in our faces. Go out and keep and eye on Lola Mills—I don't want her talking to her son—at least, not yet. Though he probably won't believe her, anyway"

"I hope you know what you're doing, because I don't!" said Oscar Piper.

But he left, and in a moment Sylvia walked in, like Joan of Arc marching to the stake. The girl stood stiff as a ramrod, and her lips were pressed tight together.

"Well, what are you waiting for, applause?" Miss Withers smiled enigmatically. "Fancy yourself as an actress, do you? Well, I *know!*"

Sylvia's eyes were like two burnt holes in a blanket. "What are you going to do about it, then?"

"I haven't made up my mind. It's not as if the Australian police wanted Sylvia Mullen for anything. She was released, and she disappeared. Of course, if the other Sylvia—the one from Hawaii—were to turn up some day—?"

"She won't!" said Sylvia. "But—but how did you know?"

"It just occurred to me to have two pictures enlarged—the one of Sylvia Mullen and the one of Sally Burris. The shape of the human ear is one feature that never changes. And you haven't the right ears to be the Australian Sylvia."

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The girl hesitated. "Did—did you give me away to Donny?"

Miss Withers shook her head.

"Oh, thank you!" cried the girl, the ice finally breaking. "I do love him! It started as a joke, aboard ship. And then I began to see that Donny was fascinated with the idea of being in love with a dangerous, glamorous poison-murderess! That's really all the hold I have on him, don't you see? He thinks that I'm Sylvia Mullen playing Sylvia Burris—*only he's got it the wrong way around!*"

"Hardly a firm foundation for a marriage, is it?"

"But I'm making him happy! I'm playing a lifetime role, for an audience of one! And I ought to be good at it—I really did sit in the courtroom at the trial to get the Mullen girl down pat, and I did play the lead in *Black Widow,* the play based on her life that got laughed off the boards in one week in Melbourne. But now I'm going over great!"

"Far be it from me," said Miss Withers wistfully, "to come between a woman and her natural prey. I never quite snagged a man, myself. So be off with you!"

The girl gave her an impulsive hug and ran out of the room. And a few minutes later the two best friends and favorite sparring partners stood arm in arm at the barrier and watched the big jet soar up into the night.

"Imagine their life together," said Oscar Piper dryly. "Every time Donny Mills fancies she's angry at him, he'll taste his soup the way porcupines make love."

"And how's that, Oscar?"

"*Very* carefully!"

"Some men like to live dangerously," the schoolteacher told him. "And speaking of danger, that mother of his has gone home. I hope she's gone for keeps, because I don't like good-looking rich widows hanging around you. And if you're worried about your trophy, I gave her a chance to save her face—she slipped it into my handbag when we were coming over in the taxi. Here it is, good as new."

But in taking the gun from her capacious carry-all, her finger quite by accident caught the trigger. There was a flash of flame, a fearful blast, and the screaming whine of a bullet losing itself in the sky. Before a crowd could gather, the Inspector seized the gun and ran hell-bent for the exit. But Miss Hildegarde Withers beat him by a nose.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **GEORGE HARMON COXE**

TITLE: ***The Killer Cop***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Dennis Carr

LOCALE: United States

TIME: During World War II

COMMENTS: *Denny Carr came back from the Italian campaign a war hero; but he came back with a problem—a problem that was not his alone, a problem we should not forget.*

LIKE MOST NICKNAMES THIS ONE was born of spontaneity and friendly regard, and it is likely that it would not have survived the Italian front after Dennis Carr left there on a stretcher had it not been for the combat correspondent who used it in a story.

That story told the world how Dennis (Killer) Carr had won the D.S.C. for defending a position in the west end of Cassino so recklessly that he had, in one afternoon, killed twenty-one Germans by the actual count of his superior officer.

Denny didn't know about the dispatch until Nora Marin enclosed the clipping in a letter while he was in the hospital; but when he came home with a patched-up knee that was deemed serviceable enough for a detective in the police department, if not for the Army, he understood how the nickname had preceded him.

Almost from the first some of his friends in the precinct house, and sometimes a cabby or newsboy, called him Killer; he did not resent it but grinned back because it was not unpleasant to hear and was given in friendliness. To Denny Carr it did not matter whether someone called him "Butch," or "Killer," or simply, "Hi," so long as it was friendly.

It had been like that until two nights ago when he had shot and

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killed Leo Aranson in the back room of a River Street tavern. Since then, since yesterday morning and McQuillen's piece in the *Bulletin,* the name had a new and ugly significance.

McQuillen had played it up big. *Killer Carr Does It Again,* is what the piece said; *Slain Suspect Another Notch for Detective's Gun,* McQuillen had said, and down at the bottom of the column he reported that Alderman Zeigler would demand a full and open inquiry.

Now, with the late afternoon sun prying at the shades of the District Attorney's office, the inquiry was nearly over. The witnesses—the bartender from the tavern and two men who had been customers at the time—had been excused. Alderman Zeigler, a cousin of Aranson, was shaking his finger at Braim, the District Attorney.

"Because this man is a hero," he said, "and got decorated for killing a lot of Germans in the war has got nothing to do with the murder of Leo Aranson. The fact is, no matter how you try to explain it, no gun was found, and I say Leo Aranson did not have a gun."

Braim glanced at Commissioner Cleary and Captain Hague. He sighed and his voice was patient.

"We've gone over all that, Mr. Zeigler."

"Furthermore," Zeigler said, "this man is an expert pistol shot. You won the police medal before you went to war, didn't you?" he said to Carr. "Yet in this little room—by your own story you were not over fifteen feet from Aranson—you were not satisfied to wound or cripple him, you shot to kill. At the heart."

Denny Carr tried to be as patient as Braim. "No," he said. "I told you what I did." And he explained again what had happened.

The affair had started out as a routine checkup. The Aranson brothers—Leo and Nate—who, in a period since they had been expelled from school, had been charged with everything from petty larceny to murder and convicted but once, were wanted for questioning in connection with the fatal shooting of a policeman named McCarthy, who had frustrated the attempted robbery of a liquor store.

A few nights later, in the guarded, anonymous manner of most tips, a telephone call came to Denny Carr's home. Because it was late and he did not want to bother Tom Linehan, his partner and a family man, he walked alone into this River Street tavern, glanced at the customers at the bar and, without asking quesitons, continued to a closed door at the rear.

What happened when he opened that door was clear in a general sort of way, but it was so swiftly done that some of the details were lost.

Of these facts he was sure: there

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had been three men in the room, two standing near a door leading to the alley and one sitting down within recognition range of the room's single light. This man was Leo Aranson who jumped up and ignoring Denny's command reached into his pocket, backing into the shadows as he did so.

By this time the alley door was open and Denny had no time to stop the two who darted through; for Leo Aranson's arm was moving upward and Denny knew the blur of glistening metal in the hand was a gun.

He saw then what he had to do and aimed at the upper arm, an easy shot, and squeezed the trigger and it was in that split instant that Aranson, unaccountably, tried to twist aside. Denny knew as the shot hammered through the room that he had not hit the arm, but there was nothing to be done about that now; and when Aranson fell Denny went swiftly past and through the door.

Footsteps rapped faintly in the alley and he ran after them, seeing nothing in the blackness, yet knowing somehow that the two men had split, that one of them was Nate Aranson. He knew, too, that the man he now pursued had too great a start, but he kept on, until he saw his chase was hopeless.

Leo Aranson was still alive when Denny Carr re-entered the back room. The door to the bar was closed and he stopped to look for the gun before he went out and there was no gun on Aranson or under him or anywhere in the room. The customers and the bartender watched him as he came out. They said no one had come from that room since he had first entered it. . . .

Now, when Denny came out of the District Attorney's office, the reporters and photographers covering the inquiry were waiting in the hall. So was Detective Tom Linehan, and that helped a lot, seeing him smile and step through the knot of newsmen and take Denny's arm and say, "Let's go."

Denny Carr wanted to duck away from those flash bulbs and cameras. He watched the faces. Three days ago some would have called him Killer and grinned; now they studied him soberly and wanted a story.

He and Tom pushed on past them, saying they'd have to see the District Attorney or the Commissioner. He didn't want to tell them that Braim said there was no cause for further action, either by his office or the Grand Jury; he didn't want to talk at all and they saw this and fell back to wait for official word—all but McQuillen.

McQuillen kept pace, a lean, sardonic man who had ulcers and a lingering bitterness in his soul because the Armed Forces wanted no part of him. "I guess they had to whitewash you," he said. "What else could you do with a hero?"

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Denny Carr did not trust himself to answer, but went down the steps, holding himself tightly, a compact, sturdy man with dark eyes that were fixed and brooding.

"If you'd been Detective Joe Doakes," McQuillen said, "you'd be lucky to get off with—"

"If he was Joe Doakes," Linehan said, "he wouldn't rate two lines in your lousy sheet. . . . Hey, there's Nora."

Nora Marin waved to them from her car and Linehan steered Denny toward the open door. McQuillen stuck with them.

"It's okay, Miss Marin," he said. "You can relax. Officially the Killer's record is still spotless."

"Why don't you go away?" Linehan said.

Nora Marin seemed not to hear any of this or to be aware of McQuillen or Linehan. She was wearing slacks and a cardigan; there was a scarf around her dark hair just the way she had come from work, and her eyes were wide and deeply concerned.

"Is it, Denny?" she said. "Is it all right?"

"It's all right."

For an instant she leaned back, all breath gone from her but the smile still there; then she moved behind the wheel to give him room.

"Your mother asked me for dinner," she said. "She said I could come just the way I am."

Denny swallowed fast. He was strangely embarrassed, afraid to be alone with her just yet, not knowing why. "I—I ought to get back to the station house for a few minutes," he said. "You go along and—"

"What for?"

Denny turned and Linehan was scowling amusedly at him and McQuillen was no longer there. "Didn't you hear what the lady said?" Linehan added. "Get in." He nudged Denny Carr and then closed the door. "And quit brooding," he said. "It ain't polite."

Mrs. Carr came from the kitchen, bringing the smell of broiling chops with her. She stopped across the living-room and for an instant, as Denny glanced at her, her face was drawn and anxious; then she looked at Nora and smiled quickly and came to kiss her son's cheek.

"What did I tell you?" she said. "How could it be any other way?" And she gave his arm a pat and promptly ignored him for Nora. She wanted to know if that was a new scarf and wasn't it pretty and would Nora like to clean up?

Nora laughed, a quick, relieved sound. She said she was positively filthy and started for the bathroom, while Mrs. Carr went back to the kitchen. Denny sat down and gradually the tension went from him, gradually his mind adjusted itself and he was grateful for the understanding Tom Linehan and Nora and his mother had shown.

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When Nora came back with her skin glowing and her dark hair falling softly about her small, bright face, he kissed her red mouth lightly, touched her chin with his fist, and kissed her again when she arched her brows at him. It felt like old times, and it felt good.

At dinner they talked of Nora's brothers in the Navy and her work at the factory which made portable radios, and presently the meal was over and nothing had been said about the stories McQuillen had written. Denny helped clear the table and went into the kitchen when the women started the dishes to tell them he was going to the corner for cigarettes.

Then, with no warning, his mother said, "Those stories in the paper won't make any difference, will they, Denny?"

"About what?"

"Well—all that horrid talk about Killer Carr."

She stood with her back to him, and he stared at her, sensing the doubt and uncertainty behind the question.

"Everyone knows that killing all those Germans was something you had to do," she said. "Just like what happened the other night was something that couldn't be helped. But people won't think you're like that, will they? They—don't call you that to your face?"

Denny stood quite still, a growing stiffness in his back and his palms suddenly damp. Exasperation shook him and his throat felt choked, and then there was nothing left but dismay and the knowledge that he must control his voice and pretend her fears were groundless.

"A few do," he said, managing a chuckle. "A cop has to expect things like that. You learn to take it."

The sound of the dishes and silver was loud in the little room; then it was silent again and his mother said, "I was thinking about Nora. I was wondering if people would—"

Nora Marin cut in quickly, "Oh, but Mother Carr! This will all be forgotten in no time."

His mother sighed. "I don't know what makes me talk like that," she said, her voice contrite. "I'm sorry, Denny. It's the inquiry, I guess. Your father was on the police force thirty years and he never had to go through an inquiry and I guess it frightened me."

Denny held himself tightly and, not trusting himself to speak at all, went out and down the stairs and along the street, blindly, cold all over. He got his cigarettes and went around the block and into a bar where the bartender served him without comment and he tried to drink and found he had no taste for whiskey.

The things his mother said—and had not said but implied—still rang loud and clear in his ears, and

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he stared straight ahead realizing now that of these things one had occurred to him in the past two days. He had closed his mind against it then, but now, in his despair, he brought it into focus and examined it.

He was Killer Carr and Nora—"Mrs. Killer Carr," he thought. "And some day it might be Killer Carr's son, or daughter."

And it seemed to him now that his mother's fears were right, that it was a name no man could give to the woman he loved. He fashioned the words again with his mind and then he heard the sound of them. Someone had whispered Killer Carr, or so it seemed, and he turned, aware now of the others in the room.

He did not know his scowl was black and morose as he surveyed the row of customers; all he knew was that they seemed to look at him with awe and uncertainty and had, in some way, moved back along the bar so that he stood alone. He stared at them and the room was still and then, because the torment in his mind was getting worse, he turned abruptly and went out.

His mother and Nora were in the living-room. They said he had been gone quite a while and he said he'd stopped to talk with a fellow. He sat down opposite Nora, screwing up his courage to tell her now, right here in front of his mother, that it would be better to break their engagement. He groped for words with which to phrase his twisted thoughts and looked into her eyes and saw then that there was no doubt in them. Instead, he saw her smile and the rounded slenderness of her that was so wonderful to hold, and his determination oozed away and he found his throat was dry.

"Do you want to go somewhere?" he asked.

"If you want to," Nora said.

"Denny." Mrs. Carr laid down her knitting. "Do you think you'd ever want to quit the force?"

He stared at her bewildered. "Quit the force?" he said.

His mother lowered her glance. "I just wondered," she said. "I thought—well, in times like these with war workers so badly needed, I wondered if maybe some job in a factory—for a while—"

She floundered and stopped. Denny swallowed, hearing Nora's soft gasp, feeling the tightness come about his mouth. Anger struck at him and he fought it and tried to speak reasonably.

"Where'd you get that idea?" he said finally. "The city needs good cops—more now than ever with so many in the service. I always figured the better the police department, the better the town and the kids and the people."

He swallowed again and suddenly his anger was gone and he knew that the things his mother had said in the kitchen were but a

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prelude to this. "And, anyway, I don't know anything else. I never wanted to be anything else," he said, his laugh short and ironic. "And I guess you can blame that on Dad. Being a cop was good enough for him."

"Yes," his mother said.

Nora stood up and touched his shoulder. "Crosby and Hope are down at the Bijou," she said.

He got up. He said, yes, he'd been wanting to see that one. He got his hat, grateful for the suggestion. It would be dark in the Bijou. No one could see his face and he wouldn't have to talk . . .

Denny Carr made up his mind about one thing in the sleepless night that followed and when he reported for duty the following day he left his gun at home. He might have gone around like this indefinitely if Captain Hague had not called him into his office two days later and asked to see it.

Denny colored. He said he had forgotten the gun, and privately he wondered if his mother had come across it at home and called Hague.

"Go home and get it," Hague said. "And see that you carry it. A loaded gun is part of your equipment. Any time you don't want to carry it while you're on duty, you'd better turn in your shield." He hesitated, then accented his words. "And if I were you I'd quit worrying about Leo Aranson and start thinking about Nate."

Denny Carr had been doing both. He had let it be known where it would do the most good that he would look with approval on any information as to the whereabouts of Nate Aranson and the third man who was with him that night in the River Street tavern. And though he did not get what he wanted, word came back to him by devious ways that Nate Aranson, in his own fashion, was looking for Denny Carr. Even Tom Linehan heard the rumor.

"Watch yourself," he said. "Those Aranson brothers were in everything together and that Nate is one of them psychopaths."

In a way Denny Carr was thankful for his job. He did not see Nora for three days, nor did he go home until late, and it was easy to explain his absence by saying he was following some new lead.

He could not, however, avoid the things he saw in the daytime. His friends no longer called him Killer but there were others, less kindly disposed, who found in McQuillen's sniping articles about the inquiry the material for continued taunts.

"Hi, Killer," they'd say, having less animosity for Denny Carr than for the police in general, "when you gonna get another notch for your gun? . . . Who you knocking off this week?" they'd say.

Denny took them tight-lipped

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and silent. No longer was there laughter in the locker rooms when he was present and he thought there were some who avoided him deliberately. Even Tom Linehan grew silent when his efforts to laugh things off and kid around brought no reaction from the victim.

Not until Saturday night did Denny see Nora and then, because this was a date planned long ago, they went out to dinner. Nothing about Nora had changed; she kissed him when she opened the door and sat close to him in the car and it was so nice to have her there and hear her quick low laughter that he was ashamed of his brooding and neglect.

Gradually the pressure around his heart melted away. The thing he feared most did not happen. On the street and in the hotel he saw people he knew but no one called him Killer in front of Nora. Afterward at the night club no one spoke to him and they got a table along the wall and when the lights dimmed and a girl came out on the floor to sing, Nora's hand stole into his. Feeling her beside him, the warm softness of her hand, he knew how much he had missed her and was for a little while content.

He paid no attention to the master of ceremonies who came on after the singer. Vaguely he heard the fellow introduce some celebrity and saw a man rise and bow from a table across the room; then the spotlight swiveled back to the m.c. Denny was watching Nora and liking what he saw and he did not hear what the fellow said until the spotlight suddenly struck him in the face.

Then, as though from a great distance he heard his own name and something that sounded like: "hero of the Italian campaign and our own police department . . . intrepid, fearless, and a bad man to cross—Killer Carr! There he is, folks, with the lovely little lady in yellow. Stand up, Killer. Take a bow."

The m.c. was clapping loudly. A half-hearted ripple of applause could not sustain itself. Denny did not feel Nora's knee nudge his, nor hear her whispered, "Denny!" He heard only a roaring in his ears and could not think or even breathe, and simply sat there with muscles rigid and skin icy, quite powerless to move.

The m.c. laughed hollowly. He said, "I guess the Killer is shy as well as deadly," and made some signal with his hand so that the spotlight shifted back to him.

Denny was suddenly shaken and sick inside and the perspiration came quick and cold. Nora took his hand and said, "Why, Denny," and somehow he helped her with her coat and got the check paid and went stumbling out of the room.

It was better in the car. He could

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breathe again and it was good to drive and hold the wheel hard in his hands. Nora, who had tried at first to talk, was silent now, but he did not notice this and muttered things which even he himself did not understand.

Finally he stopped in front of her house and turned off the ignition. Then he said what he had to say: that it was no good going on this way, that what happened tonight was just a sample of what she could expect when she went out with him.

His voice shook. "What I'm saying is, Nora, that when you go out with me people will stare and sometimes you'll hear them whisper and pretty soon you'll know what they're thinking—that I'm a killer."

"Denny." Nora put her hand on his arm and her voice was soft. "When you shot Leo Aranson he had a gun, didn't he?"

"Yes."

"Have you ever *felt* that you were a killer? That something inside you was different? How *did* you feel, that afternoon in Italy?"

He had gone over all this before in his mind. He thought he knew and he tried now, groping a little for the right words, to explain how it was.

"I didn't feel any different afterward," he said. "I didn't feel anything much at the time, nothing like what you're talking about, anyway. I was just another guy with an M-1 and some grenades and a Browning I'd got from a guy who didn't need it any more. If I felt anything it was being cold and numb and maybe a little dazed. After we were pulled back and we'd got some sleep and sunshine and baths and hot food we were all right again, those that were left, and the killing was nothing but a hazy something that you knew had happened."

He stopped, not knowing quite how to go on, and Nora sighed and her voice was still soft. "Yes," she said. "I knew it must be like that. It hasn't hurt you, except maybe for a little while and—"

"It'll hurt you," Denny said and now the hardness was in his voice and in his chest. "It's tough enough for a girl to marry a cop and worry about him, without having to defend him all the time. You know who you'll be if you marry me, don't you?"

"But, Denny—"

"Killer Carr's wife, that's who you'll be! And what about kids? A son maybe to grow up and find out from other kids that his old man was a killer. Killer Carr's boy! . . . Well, I say it's no good. There isn't going to be any wedding next month. Maybe, if I ever find Nate Aranson—"

Nora cut in abruptly and now there was in her voice a stiffness and restraint worse than anger. "If you don't mind, Denny, I'd rather not talk about it."

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She reached for the car door and he started to reach for her but caught himself in time. He sat still, hearing her say, "I'm too tired to argue, Denny. Good night—and thanks for the lovely evening."

He watched her get out and go up the steps. He saw the door close on her and he could bear the ache inside him now because this way was best; this was, after all, what he had to do . . .

Denny Carr said nothing of this to his mother but it was a strain, and he was glad when, two days later, a call came from her sister who was sick and wanted to know if his mother could come and stay with her a few days in Hartford.

He came home shortly before six that night and got rid of his gun and cleaned up and then took his mother to the bus station. He ate alone in a place where no one was likely to know him and had a couple of beers and came home just after nine.

It was a warm evening and the door of the house—an old brick house that had been converted into apartments—stood open. Denny went up the steps and through the vestibule and as he stepped through the open inner doorway the man moved out from behind the stairs that lay against the left wall twenty feet ahead.

He was a burly, thick-necked man and his name was Eddie Rocco and there was a snub-nosed gun in his big hand. And in that first instant Denny Carr saw that even had he been carrying his own gun he would have no chance to use it. He took a slow step, seeing now that Nate Aranson had followed Rocco from behind the stairs; then waited for them, tensed, alert, resentful.

Nate Aranson was a thin, swart man with a tight, ugly mouth and mean little eyes. He spoke once to Rocco and came close, holding the gun steady while the big man slapped Denny's pockets and stepped back.

"No gun, huh?" Aranson said. "And old lady's out, ain't she? So let's go upstairs and get it. I'm gonna let you have it with the same gun you used on Leo, copper."

Denny Carr looked at Rocco, keeping an eye on Aranson's gun. He said, "You were with him the other night, Rocco," and as he spoke he lunged sideways and grabbed for Aranson's hand.

He got the hand as the gun went off. He kept moving, holding the gun hand, and reached for Aranson with his left. Rocco fired from four feet away and Denny's arm was up and the bullet slammed high up under the arm and he felt the numbing shock in his chest.

It did not stop him. He had the front of Aranson's coat in his left now and he yanked and pivoted, spinning the other in front of him as he twisted at the gun. Rocco's gun hammered again. And again Denny felt the impact of the slug,

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not in his own body this time but in the frame of Nate Aranson.

Rocco was not a very good shot, or perhaps he was rattled, or maybe it was like the night when Denny had aimed at an arm only to have his man duck at the wrong instant. And Rocco saw what he had done, for Aranson, with Rocco's bullet in him, cried out and stiffened before he started to sag.

Denny held him and twisted the gun free. Rocco saw this and now Rocco had had enough. He spun and leaped through the doorway, through the vestibule, and down the steps.

Denny let go of Nate Aranson and stepped around him. He ran to the outer doorway and stopped there. Rocco was in the street now, running, firing once over his shoulder in a shot that went wide. Denny snapped up Aranson's gun and, not thinking, aimed low and fired. Rocco took one more running step and fell on his face as though one leg had been cut from under him, his gun spinning across the pavement.

Two men, passing on the opposite side of the street, stopped to watch and Denny called to them. He told them to get the gun and watch Rocco. He went back into the hall and told the assembled wide-eyed tenants to phone the police and to clear out of the hall.

He thought about his own gun then, and wondered if, in spite of the spreading numbness in his chest, he could walk upstairs and get it. Captain Hague would bawl him out for not carrying it but right now he could not seem to care much. He sat down on the steps and watched Aranson and fought against a giddiness that was getting worse . . .

They gave Denny Carr some pills after they'd finished cleaning the wound and he slept a long time. It was midafternoon when he finally awoke and when he glanced about he saw Tom Linehan sitting there grinning at him.

"How do you feel?"

"Feel fine," Denny said. "What about Rocco and Aranson?"

"Rocco's going to be limping for a long time: That shot of yours smashed his knee. And Aranson'll be okay. Right now he's talking plenty. The gun you took away from him is the one that killed McCarthy, the cop, in that liquor store holdup."

Denny stared. "What?" he said, a little slow at figuring.

Linehan nodded. "It was the gun Leo Aranson pulled on you that night. Nate says so. He has to say so and I think he's telling the truth. It's like this: after you shot Leo you chased Rocco and Nate, but it was Rocco you really chased because Nate hid just outside the door and you didn't see him. When you went after Rocco he ducked back into the room. Leo was alive and didn't think that he was going

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to die and he had to get rid of this gun that killed McCarthy; so Nate took it and legged it down the alley the other way. When you got back there wasn't any gun."

McQuillen came in shortly after Linehan left. He had a paper in his hand and passed it to Denny. In it was a story that told of the shooting and spoke not of Killer Carr but of Detective Dennis Carr.

"You're lucky," McQuillen said.

Denny agreed. He said the doc told him if the bullet had been an inch lower and to the left it would have been curtains.

"That isn't what I meant," McQuillen said. "I mean having a girl like Nora Marin. She came in to see me a couple of days ago. She bawled me out and she made a point I hadn't thought about before. She said I was making a mistake writing about *'Killer'* Carr because she said in a way you represented every other guy who would come back from the war."

McQuillen paused. He seemed a bit embarrassed. "She said all women will worry some about their men who come back, and I was making it worse by playing up the killing angle. Well, she's right, I guess. I hadn't thought about it that way before."

McQuillen had more to say along the same line and when he left, Denny Carr lay there, humble but impatient, and watched the door until Nora came. Her cheeks were flushed with hurrying.

"They said you were all right," she said. "They told me you'd sleep most of the day so—I went to work."

It was so wonderful to see her, to have her with him, that for a long moment he just looked at her and was content. "Come here," he said finally. "Give me a kiss."

She tipped her head and eyed him with amused severity. "I'm not sure I want to. I don't mind marrying a detective—if he's a good one—but I'm not sure I want to marry an idiot. You didn't have your gun with you last night."

He grinned. He did not bother to tell her that it would have done little good under the circumstances. He said happily, "I shot him in the knee. Rocco, I mean."

She came to the bed, frowning, putting her cool hand on his head.

He knew she didn't understand, so he said, "I didn't have to. When I came back I knew the war hadn't made a killer out of me, but after the publicity and the way people looked at me and called me Killer, I began to wonder if maybe I'd changed and didn't know it. But—well, if it had been a German—in Italy—I'd have shot him in the body but *I aimed at Rocco's leg, just automatically, without thinking,* and that proves—"

Nora was on the bed, bending over him, her eyes moist and tender as she kissed him. "You goon," she whispered. "You sweet, stubborn goon. Don't you think I

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knew? But you just wouldn't let me tell you."

She had her cheek against his now and he clung to her, his heart full and his eyes scratchy. He thought about the things she had said to McQuillen, how she had defended him to his mother, and he knew then that if every woman was just as patient and understanding with her man as Nora had been with him, those who came back would have no trouble —no trouble at all.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **JAMES HOLT MCGAVRAN**

TITLE: ***Horn of Plenty***

TYPE: Crime Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *In the Grand Ballroom of the Piermont Hotel two employees of Horne Supermarkets were being retired. One was Sammy Collins, the night watchman; the other was the man Sammy hated most . . .*

AFTER WHAT HAD HAPPENED LAST night, Sammy Collins would have preferred to be almost any place in the world except in the lobby of the Piermont Hotel, on his way to Homer Mason's retirement banquet. Since the only two other places he could possibly have been were at home with Bess, or in jail, he had chosen the hotel. It wasn't much of a choice any way you looked at it.

Small and light-footed as he was, Sammy felt conspicuous and awkward as he picked his way through the unfamiliar lobby, searching from behind oversized glasses for some sign to direct him to the Grand Ballroom. Everything about him was too big—the heavy blue serge suit which hung loosely on his wiry frame, the broad-brimmed felt hat, the white shirt which Bess had laundered so badly. Even his flamboyant necktie was too large, as if it had been bought a long time ago for somebody else.

"Sammy—Sammy Collins!" a familiar and hated voice boomed out at him. "Hey, Sammy, we're waiting for you."

Sammy turned and saw Homer Mason beckoning to him from the stag bar.

"Come on over, Sammy. I'm buying the next round. Everybody's waiting to congratulate you for what you did last night."

Homer Mason was exactly Sammy's age, but the only other thing they had in common was that both looked so perfect for the parts they

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played in the Horne Supermarkets Corporation. Mousy little Sammy was accurately cast in the role of night watchman for the warehouse. Loud, extroverted Homer Mason needed no tag to identify him as vice-president in charge of public relations. His impressive, round-bellied figure spoke eloquently of the foods sold by Horne's. If you were particularly susceptible to suggestion, you could even convince yourself that these superior foodstuffs would preserve your hair, your teeth, and a hearty pink-and-white complexion.

"Fellows," Homer shouted to the group around the bar, "I want you to meet the real hero of last night's excitement—Sammy Collins!"

Sammy realized instantly that he was in pretty important company. Long-nosed Mr. Horne himself was present, as well as the Mayor, the president of the Chamber of Commerce, various Horne vice-presidents and other luminaries.

"Congratulations, Sammy," Mr. Horne said. "You sure handled yourself well last night. Did everything you could do."

For a moment or two everything was the way he had hoped it would be. Mr. Horne was nice enough to remember that Sammy was retiring, too, and everyone congratulated him. But then they went back to their drinking, leaving him alone to sip his unaccustomed scotch and soda.

He gathered from their conversation that last night's burglary had amounted to more than ten thousand dollars, mostly in fives, tens and twenties. It didn't seem to worry Mr. Horne much one way or the other, losing all that money, but it made Sammy sick all over. And it made him still sicker to see Homer Mason standing at the bar with his arm draped over Mr. Horne's shoulder. The two-face, Sammy thought. The dirty two-face.

It was all Homer Mason's fault. The way he had always acted so high and mighty around Sammy! The final straw had been last night's paper, carrying that story on the front page showing Homer with his shock of white hair and phony smile. It told of all the civic committees on which he had served, the charity drives for which he had acted as chairman, and all the other stuff a man like Homer does to get his name in the papers.

"I'm surprised they even asked you to the banquet," Bess had commented acidly when she read the story in the paper. "They don't even mention about *you* retiring, Sammy."

Bess was lying in bed, where she spent most of her time because of her arthritis—at least, she called it that. The doctor had murmured something vague about psychosomatic manifestations, but neither Bess nor Sammy had any idea what he meant.

"What kind of pension they giv-

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ing *him?*" Bess had wanted to know. "I bet it's more than that lousy sixty bucks a month they're giving *you*."

Sammy didn't answer. It had been a long time since he could carry on a conversation with Bess, with her constant complaining about her health, his job, the lack of money. She should have got used to being poor thirty years ago, because Sammy had never shown the least talent for making money or keeping what little he did make. Thanks to Bess's scrimping and saving over the years, they did own their little cottage and they could live on his tiny pension and social security—if you could call it living to spend all your days and nights with Bess.

"I ain't really sorry you're retiring," Bess had gone on in her whining voice. "I can sure use a little *help* around the house."

That was the moment when the full impact of retirement had hit Sammy Collins. Working as night watchman for the last twelve years, he saw little of the grossly overweight, evil-tempered Bess—there were only a few hours when they could be together, usually just long enough for him to fix dinner and do the dishes. And now, only one night away, was retirement . . .

"I've got to do something," Sammy had sworn under his breath. "I can't live out my days like this. I'll go to Mr. Horne and tell him he's got to keep me on."

But the truth was, he was scared to death of Mr. Horne and he never could have approached him. Sitting in the bar now, watching Mr. Horne drink with his guests, Sammy realized that he had done the only thing possible, even if it *had* turned out wrong.

"Guess we'd better go to the Ballroom now, Sammy," Mr. Horne said heartily, coming up to him. "We mustn't keep them waiting for the guest of honor."

Sammy blinked. He could at least tell Bess that Mr. Horne had called *him* the guest of honor, not Homer Mason! He got to his feet uncertainly. Not being a drinking man, the one weak scotch and soda was already affecting him.

"I'm sure going to miss the old place," he said, suddenly bold. "I wish I could stay on a while longer."

"Company rules," Mr. Horne replied, less pleasantly. "But look at old Homer here. We're kicking him out, too."

As if in response to hearing his name, Homer came up and took Sammy's arm.

"Come on, let's go up together," Homer said, getting him away from Mr. Horne. "Like lambs to the slaughter."

Sammy tried to wriggle loose, but he couldn't shake Homer's grip. Other groups had already formed, and Sammy and Homer went toward the Ballroom together.

"Just keep your wits about you,"

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Homer muttered under his breath, "and everything will be all right. Remember, I've backed you up every inch of the way. You got what you wanted, didn't you?"

Sammy refused to answer, and they entered the Ballroom in silence. A ripple of applause greeted them, and for once in his life Sammy Collins felt important. Everyone who had been at the bar headed directly for the speakers' table as if it were their God-given right, and Sammy was swept along with them. It was a good feeling, almost worth what it had cost him.

"You're sitting next to me," Homer Mason whispered to him, and he made it sound like a threat. "I saw to that!"

Sammy realized at once what a clever arrangement it was from Homer Mason's point of view. The night watchman would be clear at the end of the T formed by the speakers' table, where he would have no one to talk to but Homer Mason. He couldn't tell anyone the truth about last night because no one could get close enough to ask him.

"Tables look pretty, don't they?" Homer asked as they were seated. "Old Horne puts on a good show when he feels like it."

In all his life Sammy Collins had never seen anything like the Grand Ballroom of the Piermont in party dress. The tables gleamed with white linen, silver, and crystal, and such decorations as he had never dreamed of outside the movies. The Horne Supermarkets used a cornucopia as a trademark in all its advertising, one of Homer Mason's better ideas. On the tables were dozens of wicker horns of plenty, some with orchids spilling out of them, some with perfect fruits, others with vegetables that were so beautiful they looked artificial. And right in the center of the speakers' table, directly in front of Mr. Horne's place, was the shiny sterling silver horn of plenty that was to be Homer Mason's retirement present. Sammy flushed with anger when his eyes fell on it, and Homer quickly squeezed the little man's arm.

"Steady, Sammy," he murmured. "You've come this far without a slip-up. Just don't get yourself into any trouble now."

Trouble! Sammy thought. Trouble was all he could ever expect from now on—and there was nothing on earth he could do about it.

If it hadn't been for that sterling silver horn of plenty, he would never have gone through with his half-baked scheme of being a hero in the hope that Mr. Horne would keep him on. It was Homer Mason again who was to blame for it all. Hearing the men talk last night about the banquet and the gift Mr. Horne had bought for Homer was what had done it.

Sammy had been on duty at ten o'clock when the various store managers came in with their eve-

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ning receipts. There had been so many burglaries in the neighborhood that Mr. Horne had arranged for escorts to pick up the night managers with their bags of money and bring them into the safe at the general office. It was a cumbersome arrangement but, once established, hard to change because the men liked it. They enjoyed meeting their fellow managers and going off afterward to bowl or drink beer. Even Mr. Binns, the head accountant, sometimes relaxed and joked with the men as he sealed their money and stored it in the safe for counting the next day.

"Let me show you guys something," Mr. Binns had offered the night before, bringing out of the safe an object, wrapped in a chamois. "Homer Mason's going-away present." He had pulled out a gleaming horn of plenty. "Sterling silver. But want to know something?"

They had all crowded around as Mr. Binns went on in a lowered voice.

"Old Horne is so tight that he got the cheapest one he could find. It's sterling, all right, but look."

He had held it out for close inspection, not letting anyone touch it.

"The metal is so thin that if you touch it, it bends. It has to be kept stuffed with newspaper to keep it from collapsing."

There had been a lot of laughter.

"It isn't even engraved," Mr. Binns went on. "Old Horne says Homer isn't likely to forget where it came from, so why add to the expense?"

Sammy's face had flamed with envy. Mr. Horne wasn't buying him anything like that, or he missed his guess!

"Hey, Sammy, you're retiring too, ain't you?" one of the men had asked. "Going to the banquet?"

"I guess so. Sent me a free ticket, he did."

"Bet that's the first free thing you ever got off old Horne, ain't it?"

Sammy had laughed along with the rest of them, but not when they started talking about Homer Mason's pension. Three hundred a month, someone had heard, and they understood he owned over a thousand shares of company stock. It was also rumored that Mr. Horne was going to let the Masons use his vacation estate in Michigan for the summer while he took his own family to Europe.

Sammy, lost in a world of swirling resentment, had hardly listened to the rest of the conversation; but when he had let the last of them out at 10:30, he knew exactly what he was going to do. He was going to make a hero of himself so nobody would even *know* that Homer Mason was at the banquet!

First Sammy had pulled loose the wires to the burglar alarm that rang in police headquarters. Then he had collected a pile of waste and placed it in the remotest corner of

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the warehouse, being careful not to get it too close to anything inflammable. Promptly at midnight he had taken a couple of the big kicthen matches he always carried and started a fire. It was mostly smoke, because he didn't want to damage Mr. Horne's property any more than he had to, or set off the automatic sprinklers.

When the building was full of smoke, he had removed his coat and beaten out the fire. Then he had got down on the floor and rolled, had grabbed his shirt and torn it, mussed up his hair, smudged his face and finally, with a supreme effort of will, beaten his head against the wall hard enough to raise a small lump.

Then Sammy had gone to the telephone and dialed Mr. Binns's residence, knowing perfectly well that Binns was not home yet.

"He went bowling after work," Mrs. Binns had reported. "Is there anything I can do?"

"Never mind, ma'am," Sammy had replied breathlessly. "I'll call Mason. He'll know what to do."

Calling the Binns residence had been a master stroke, because Mrs. Binns could be relied on to tell the police later that Sammy had done everything he could think of under the circumstances.

Sammy had permitted himself a small, sly smile as he dialed Homer Mason's number.

"Hello, hello," Homer had answered sleepily.

"Mr. Mason, it's Sammy Collins. There's bad trouble down here at the plant. Can you come right over?"

"What kind of trouble?"

"Burglars. Someone set a fire to draw me to the back of the warehouse. I put it out, then some guy jumped me and knocked me down."

"Have you called the police?"

"The police? Don't that burglar alarm ring at police headquarters? They'll be coming. But I thought maybe you should come down, too."

"Sure thing, Sammy. Soon as they come, tell them I'm on the way."

"Thank you, Mr. Mason. I'll wait for you by the loading dock. I'm scared to go back up to the office."

It was typical of Sammy's mentality that, having told the story once, he now believed it. He had returned to the scene of the fire and his imaginary struggle, examined it carefully, upset a couple of packing cases to add an extra note of realism, then sat dejectedly on one of the crates with his head in his hands.

He suddenly remembered the door through which the bandit was supposed to have fled. Wrapping his hand in his handkerchief to avoid leaving fingerprints, he had flung the door wide open and then returned to his crate and resumed his pose—the perfect picture of a man who had risked death pro-

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tecting his employer's property on the eve of his own retirement..

Let Homer find him like this and discover the disconnected burglar alarm! Then Homer could call the police. They would believe a vice-president a lot quicker than a night watchman.

It had been a scant ten minutes before Sammy heard a car drive up to the rear. Homer Mason came racing in, still wearing pajama tops and bedroom slippers and a pair of slacks hastily pulled on.

"Sammy!" he asked. "Aren't the police here yet?"

"Not a sign of them. Maybe the alarm's broke."

"More likely they hid in here all evening and never set it off."

Sammy started to rise, wobbled uncertainly, and sank back in his seat.

"Don't try to get up yet, Sammy," Homer had advised. "You look terrible. Just tell me what happened, then I'll call the police."

"Someone set a fire right over there," Sammy pointed to the still smoldering pile, "to draw me back here, I guess. I put it out with my coat and then someone jumped me. Twice as big as me. I never had a chance."

"That's all right, Sammy. Don't worry. You did the best you could."

Homer Mason strode over to the fire, stomped out a few smoking embers. He examined the scene carefully. Suddenly he had picked up two burned-out kitchen matches and put them in his slacks pocket. Something like a smile had crossed his face as he surveyed the scene with as much care as Sammy a few minutes before. Then he had sauntered over to where the night watchman sat, a perfect picture of misery.

"Got a cigarette, Sammy?" Homer had said casually. "I came off so fast I didn't bring mine."

Sammy had automatically reached for his pocket, then remembered that his coat was on the floor.

"In my coat over there, Mr. Mason," he had said.

After lighting a cigarette with one of Sammy's matches, Homer had put the burned-out match carefully in his pocket instead of throwing it on the floor, the way most vice-presidents would have done.

"Sammy, you stay right here," Homer had then said kindly. "You're not ready to move around. I'm going to the front office and call the police."

"Yes, sir." Sammy had slumped lower on his packing case.

Left alone in the dimly lighted room and more than half convinced of the truth of his story, Sammy had been suddenly afraid. He had half turned to see if anyone was behind him. A long time later he learned that there had been. In a crash of pain and blinding lights his head had seemed to explode and he had fallen to the floor.

When he awakened, the lights

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were still blinding and his head felt as big as a watermelon. He could hear Homer Mason talking as if from a great distance.

"Just lie still a few minutes Sammy," Homer had said solicitously. "Someone knocked you out. We brought you up to Mr. Binns's office."

Sammy had opened his eyes for a second, but the light pained them so he closed them again. He could hear other voices—policemen's, he guessed—talking to Homer Mason.

"Sammy will be able to talk in a few minuets," Homer was saying. "He can tell you what happened before I got here."

Sammy was having difficulty remembering what had happened, so he pretended to be asleep while he tried to sort things out.

"Poor Sammy had already been pretty badly beaten up before I came," Homer Mason went on, as if to prompt him. "I came up here to call you, and then I went back down and found Sammy stretched out cold."

Now Sammy remembered it all—all except how he could have been hit on the head if there wasn't a burglar in the warehouse. He managed to open his eyes and look at the men around him.

"Feeling better now?" an officer asked.

Someone had helped him sit up.

"What happened?" Sammy had wanted to know feebly, stalling for time.

"Someone cleaned the safe out but good," the officer said. "Can you talk now?"

Cleaned out the safe! Sammy felt his head. Something was wrong . . . He told them the same story he had told Homer Mason, about the fire and his "struggle" with the unknown assailant. No, he'd never got a really good look at the robber because the fight was over before it began. All he knew was that the man, "a big guy," opened the back door and ran out. Then he had tried to call Mr. Binns, finally got Mr. Mason. He hadn't called the police because he thought the automatic burglar alarm would bring them.

"Someone pulled the wires loose," Homer had explained. "That's why it didn't ring."

Sammy had looked completely shocked. In truth, he had forgotten this detail of his night's work.

"I just done what I thought was right," he concluded humbly. "I guess I should have called you first, but I didn't know the alarm was broke."

He looked so frail and old that the police decided to send him home to get some sleep.

"I'll run him home," Homer Mason volunteered promptly. "Come on, Sammy old boy."

A great light burst over Sammy. It had been Homer who— But Homer was helping Sammy to his feet, steadying him with a strong arm around his waist. Now, for the

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first time, Sammy had a full view of the mess the "burglar" had made of the front office. Dozens of checks were still scattered about the floor and several hundred dollars in loose change and small bills. The safe was wide open and inside Sammy could see the silver horn of plenty on the shelf, still in its chamois skin.

Sammy, moving with difficulty, had felt something brush against his foot. It was nothing but a wad of crumpled newspaper, but he and Homer Mason spotted it at the same instant. Just as Sammy saw that the wad was firmly pressed into the shape of a cornucopia, Homer stepped on it with his big foot and ground it to a shapeless blob. Sammy's jaw opened as if to speak, but he had felt himself rudely propelled forward by Homer.

It wasn't until Homer pulled up in the driveway of Sammy's small cottage that the vice-president had said anything.

He turned off the motor, switched on the overhead light, reached into his trousers pocket, and held out his hand. In it were the three kitchen matches.

"Sammy, in case you've got any ideas about the burglary," Homer had said in a low voice, "I've got my own ideas about the fire."

"But Mr. Mason, what you done is stealing!" Sammy had protested in a voice several notes higher than usual. "You conked me on the head and robbed the safe!"

"You're crazy, Sammy. The way I'm dressed, I couldn't hide any roll of bills on my person. They already searched my car and office."

"I'll tell them where the money is. You stuffed all the big bills in that horn of plenty Mr. Horne is going to give you tomorrow night!"

Mr. Mason had smiled patiently, as if he were dealing with a child.

"But Sammy, then you'd have to admit that you set the place on fire, made a false report to the police, ruined the burglar alarm, and left the door standing wide open for anyone to come in and crack the safe. Looks to me like you'd be in plenty of trouble. You'd go to jail, lose your pension."

Sammy's slow mind was quick to see the hopelessness of his position. He had to back up Homer Mason's story just as Homer had backed up his.

"But it ain't fair," Sammy had cried. "Look how much more you're getting out of it than me."

"You're getting what you wanted, aren't you? Your name and picture will be in the paper and everyone will shake your hand at the banquet. What more do you want?"

Sammy was almost in tears. Homer Mason would receive the horn of plenty with its hidden treasure from the hand of the boss himself.

"But why would you do a thing like that, Mr. Mason?"

Homer Mason had rested his big hand gently on Sammy's bony knee.

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"I'm broke, Sammy, that's why," he had said softly. "I'm old and I'm out of work. I never saved a button. I liked to live too good. Maybe I got enough tonight to keep me going a while longer—in style."

And now they were at the banquet, while the endless speeches droned on. Sammy was named a hero for saving the plant from burning down; he had even suffered physical injury in fighting with a desperate criminal. Mr. Horne tied this into the American system of free enterprise and managed to make it sound as if Sammy had struck a telling blow against Communism.

Homer Mason was praised, too, but somehow he came off second best. It was Sammy's night, all right; and if it hadn't been for the gnawing, helpless rage he felt toward the thieving vice-president, he would have enjoyed himself.

Mr. Horne was coming to the end of his speech. He lifted the silver horn of plenty high for everyone to see, then turned to his two retiring employees and asked them to rise.

Both men got to their feet, Homer Mason smiling with easy confidence, Sammy Collins grimacing nervously. The banquet guests applauded dutifully until Mr. Horne gestured for silence. With a quick motion he picked up an orchid-filled, wicker cornucopia.

"To Homer Mason," he said, holding it out to his vice-president. "But only as a token until the other silver piece arrives."

Homer Mason's face went white as he accepted the wicker basket in unsteady hands and sank weakly into his chair.

"And to Sammy Collins," Mr. Horne continued pompously, "for his years of loyal service and his great heroism last night, I present this silver horn of plenty. Sammy, may you always enjoy the prosperity and abundance which it signifies!"

Mr. Horne said later that it was worth every cent the banquet cost just to see the way Sammy accepted it.

For a moment the night watchman stood there in front of everyone, a beautiful smile lighting his homely face as he caressed the fragile silver horn of plenty. He even balanced it in his hands, as if weighing it, and nodding in approval. Then, with touching simplicity, he excused himself, saying he must hurry back to his sick wife, and firmly refusing Homer Mason's choked offer of a ride home.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **NORMAN DANIELS**

TITLE: ***Callahan's Hat***

TYPE: Cop Story

LOCALE: United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *Every officer who entered or left police headquarters deposited money in the 50-year-old helmet. It taught big-executive Larkin a lesson in human affairs . . .*

RICHARD LARKIN CAST A SIDEWAYS glance at the girl beside him and wondered why he didn't do something about her. She'd been his good right hand now for—let's see—four years? Yes, four. He remembered how he'd thought her very lovely, that day she walked in as his new private secretary. But four years ago there had been at least a few idle moments when he had time to notice a pretty girl.

He drove fast. Everything he did was at an exaggerated speed and he credited his rapid progress to that. At thirty-three, he was definitely successful. Never a wasted moment, never a wasted word. Now they were on the highway leading to the airport and the road was clear. He was doing sixty and not even aware of it.

"Let's see now," he mused, "the Commercial Trust meeting tomorrow in Cleveland—you've set everything up?"

"Yes, sir," Diane said promptly. "Plane, rental car waiting, hotel, plane ticket on the nine o'clock flight to New York on Friday. I had some difficulty convincing Mr. Palmer and Mr. Derkins that you'd require them Sunday, but they agreed finally."

"It's a good thing for Mr. Palmer and Mr. Derkins," Richard said, somewhat grimly. "Well, I guess that's all then."

"Yes, sir," she said. "I'll sign the letter to the Mayor for you. That is, if it's legal. I'm not up in these matters."

"Legal?" he asked, and thought a moment. "Oh, you mean turning

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down his invitation that I become a member of the Police Board. Nothing legal involved, Miss Kehoe. The Mayor asked me, I refused. No time—let someone else guide the efficiency of our police force."

"Yes, sir," she said.

He glanced at her for an instant. She was lovelier than that day she'd come to work for him. Much lovelier. Then the fairness of her flaxen hair hadn't seemed real, though he knew by now that it was. Her profile was clean-cut, definite, the face of a girl with character. She used make-up artfully, not tastelessly, as if only to attract. There was a subtle perfume about her, present but elusive, as perfumes should be.

Suddenly he wished there was more time—a dinner, perhaps. He made up his mind to attend to it when he got back from this trip.

"You seem concerned about that letter to the Mayor," he said, judging her thoughtful frown correctly.

She turned her head and smiled "Did I show it that much, Mr. Larkin? I—well, I hoped you might agree to serve on that board."

"Why?" He shot the word, as he always did when he was irritated.

"Oh—it's really not an important reason. My father was a police officer before he died. In a mid-western city. I was raised to respect a uniform."

"I see. Well, my opinion is that members of Police Boards should be elderly, at least semi-retired, and with time for such a job."

"Yes, sir," she said.

"We'll drop the subject, eh?"

"Yes, sir."

"You might fill me in on the Cartwright business . . ."

Diane Kehoe barely repressed a smile. "I'm afraid you're in for some trouble, sir. There was a motorcycle policeman down that side street and now he's following us."

Richard looked up in the mirror and said something under his breath. It *would* happen at a time like this, when he was in such a hurry. He invariably developed a self-righteous anger when he was delayed by anyone or anything, and he was angry now.

"Hiding, was he? That's a great way to prevent accidents. Hiding, while some crazy drunk will take a chance and drive his car fast when he wouldn't dare if that officer were in the open." He looked up at the mirror again. The cop was closing fast. "Oh, well, perhaps he won't stop me."

"He will," Diane said, and she managed to keep enough of the smugness out of her voice so that he didn't notice.

The siren backed up her certainty and Richard eased over to the side of the road. The motorcycle cop was middle-aged, nobody to fool around with; Diane suddenly found herself worrying about her boss because he was in trouble.

The cop looked into the car, saluted Diane with a touch of gauntleted fingers to his crash helmet.

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"Airport in a hurry," he said pleasantly. "A big hurry. Mister, we've had a dozen big-hurry accidents on this road in the last month."

"I suppose so," Richard said evenly. When he talked that way, he was ready to blow up. "Planes have a habit of taking off on schedule."

"So they tell me," the cop smiled. "Never flown myself. But if planes take off on time, passengers could leave a few minutes earlier so they'd be on time, without risking life and limb. Don't you think so? May I have your driver's license and registration certificate?"

Richard looked at his watch. It would be more sensible to just take the summons, get it over with. He searched his pockets for his wallet.

"I'll have it for you in a moment," he said grumblingly.

"You're the one in a hurry," the cop said pleasantly. He went to the back of the car to check the plates.

"Right now," Richard said, "I wish I was on the Police Board."

"I'm afraid it wouldn't do you much good, sir," Diane said.

"I suppose not." A frantic note came into his voice. "Good heavens, my wallet . . . I forgot to bring it! Miss Kehoe, you'll have to go to my apartment—the superintendent will let you in. Mail my wallet by air, special delivery. Take the cash out. I can manage that with no trouble . . ."

"You can't manage producing your license and registration," Diane said. "That's your present problem."

"Damn it," he said fervently, and the cop had his head at the window again. "I'm sorry, Officer, but I've forgotten my wallet and all my identification. My name is Richard Larkin—this is my secretary, Miss Kehoe. Now I'm in a great hurry, my plane is leaving . . ."

The cop shook his head. "I'm sorry, Mr. Larkin. I can't let you go."

"All right, all right, but write me out the summons. Just hurry, will you, please?"

Again the stubborn shake of the head. "I can't write a summons unless I see some identification. And you can't turn a wheel of that car without a driver's license. Young lady, do you have a license?"

Diane never knew what made her do it. She clutched the handbag on her lap a bit tighter. "No, Officer, I don't have mine with me either."

"You don't?" Richard asked, as if she'd violated every rule and regulation of a private secretary.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Larkin. You did tell me to leave your car at the airport and I was to take a cab back."

"Well," Richard Larkin asked, "what do we do now?"

"Only one thing," the cop said. "I'll have to drive you to the station house. Be with you as soon as I get my bike off the street."

"You understand," Richard said severely, "that I'll miss my plane,

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possibly lose an important deal, find myself delayed and off schedule."

"I'm sorry," the cop said. "I've got problems too. If I don't handle it this way, I'll lose my job."

Diane transferred to the rear seat, Richard eased over, and the policeman drove. He was a highly skilled driver and enjoyed himself.

"Quite a car," he approved. "Air-conditioned?"

"Yes," Richard replied curtly.

The cop dropped the subject. Richard was engrossed in rearranging his schedule. Without turning his head, he said, "Miss Kehoe, you will go to my apartment and fetch my wallet. Then you will telephone Cleveland and arrange for that rental car to be ready when the later plane comes in. The New York end of it should remain as already planned."

"Yes, Mr. Larkin," she said briskly.

He twisted around now and looked back at her, hunched in one corner of the long, luxurious limousine. "About that letter you asked if you could sign—the legal aspects—remember? I see that you do. Don't mention a word of it. Do you understand, Miss Kehoe?"

"I'm sure I do," she said.

"It's just possible I may change my mind," Larkin said grimly. "It's just possible."

Police Headquarters was in a two-story, yellow-brick building erected some eighty-five years ago. Inside the main office was a long desk, running almost the full length of the room and protected by a brass arm rail projecting out about eight inches. You went around the farther end of that desk to reach the offices marked *CHIEF* and *CAPTAIN*, but it was obvious the captain didn't use his much, because he was behind the desk. A heavy-set man of about forty-five with a thick neck and big shoulders. Twenty years ago he'd have made a wonderful fullback. He was as immaculate as his uniform, and he moved casually.

The motorcycle officer explained it. The desk man began filling in a pedigree card. "I'm Captain O'Brien," he said. "Let's get the license business out of the way first."

"My secretary will bring my wallet here," Richard said. "When I show you my license and the car registration, may I then go?"

"You can go now if you wish to put up bail. Of course you can't drive."

"Bail? My money's in my wallet, Captain." Richard was trying to control his temper and assuring himself he would need tolerance because these men would hardly operate with the efficiency he was accustomed to.

"Well," Captain O'Brien said, "you don't look like a confirmed criminal, so we'll spare you the indignity of being locked up."

"Very well." Richard glanced at

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Diane. "Hurry, Miss Kehoe, will you?"

She left at once. The motorcycle officer made out a summons for speeding, driving without license or registration, and then he arranged for a squad car to bring him back to the airport road where he'd left his motorcycle. He had a few moments to wait and Richard watched him drift over to the far end of the long desk, just below the windows overlooking the street. An incongruous object sat there: a gray policeman's helmet, dating back at least fifty years when it had been part of the turn-of-the-century uniform. It was upended and the motor cop looked into it for a moment before he dug into his pocket and came up with a dollar bill. He dropped it into the hat.

Captain O'Brien nodded briefly and indicated a large paper bag on the desk. "Somebody left a bag of apples. I don't know who, but they're pretty good. Have one. You too, Mr. Larkin."

The motor cop helped himself to a large golden apple and bit into it; the juices ran down the sides of his mouth, made him grin and reach for his handkerchief. For some reason Richard wanted one of those apples. The aroma was enticing, the juices appetizing.

"Thank you," he said, somewhat stiffly, "I will."

He was wondering what these men would think if they knew he'd been asked to serve on the Police Board which governed everything they did. Well, he wasn't going to mention it. He had no intention of using his connections as a lever to pry himself free of this situation. A man in civilian clothes came in, glanced at him sharply, saluted the captain formally, then spotted the upended gray helmet. He dropped a bill into it before continuing on his way to some back office.

Richard went across the room and sat down on a long bench. He bit into the apple and enjoyed every bite of it. While he ate and watched, three more men, two in uniform and one obviously a detective, came through. If they didn't see the helmet, Captain O'Brien inclined his head in its direction. Three more bills went into the hat. Richard looked for a place to get rid of the apple core.

"Roll it in some paper and drop it in the waste basket," O'Brien said. "Have another apple."

"Thanks—one's enough."

A man of slight build, intense, shabbily dressed, came in fast. "Hello, Terry," he said to the Captain. "What's the boy done this time?"

"I don't know, Jim. They've got him back in the Bureau. He was brought in before I came on duty and nobody knows exactly why. Swiped something, I think."

"I don't believe it," the thin man said quickly.

"All I know is what I'm told," O'Brien said. "Sergeant Prince of

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Traffic made the arrest. He'll be off duty in about an hour and we'll get the details then."

"I'll talk to the boy," the thin man said, and walked briskly toward a hallway entrance. Richard could hear him clattering his way down the dark hall.

"That," O'Brien said for Richard's benefit, "is our probation officer and there's a dedicated man for you. He isn't paid enough to make ends meet—believes in big families—but you never hear a word of complaint unless one of his boys gets in trouble. Like now. A kid who was in trouble before and placed in Jim's care. He comes like a shot when one of his boys is picked up."

"Perhaps," Richard said stiffly, "a bit more severity in dealing with juvenile delinquents is in order."

"Oh, sure—but this kid's not really a delinquent. His mother's sick, in a hospital a hundred miles away. The kid likes to visit her now and then, but he never has the money. Not old enough to work and there's only an uncle, who doesn't give a hoot, to take care of him. Hard knocks don't make juvenile delinquents, Mr. Larkin."

"Of course," Richard admitted, "you're far more experienced in matters of this kind. I only know what I read."

"In this business," O'Brien said, "you can't generalize. I've seen kids from good families who were lulus of delinquents."

An old patrolman came in with squared shoulders that looked as if they'd sag the moment he was clear of the room. He saw the gray helmet and marched over to it, donated his bill, marched upstairs to the patrolroom. He must have been close to seventy.

"Oldest man on the force," O'Brien said. "Wants to die in harness, and he will, if we have anything to say about it."

Larkin looked at his watch impatiently, then at the captain. "Could I make a phone call?"

"Sure—use this phone." O'Brien pushed one of the four phones on the desk toward him.

"I suppose I'm entitled to only one call," Richard said.

O'Brien grinned. "That's just in the movies and the big city departments. Any prisoner sober enough and cooperative can make all the necessary calls he wants."

"I see." Richard changed his mind. He'd missed the plane and now he had time to spare. It seemed odd, almost a relief. If he wanted to stay here and wait, he could do so. He wouldn't lose a dime in earnings if he did and this was an interesting experience.

"Go ahead," O'Brien invited.

"I think I'll wait for Miss Kehoe," he said.

"As you wish. She's a very pretty girl, Mr. Larkin. Or isn't it etiquette for a boss to notice that in his secretary?"

Larkin found this man so easy

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to talk to. He even laughed a bit. "Oh, I've noticed, all right, but if you want to keep a girl who is as efficient as she is, you don't let on."

"I suppose not."

"Nevertheless, I wonder what's keeping her."

"Traffic, maybe. Or she might be having trouble getting into your place. Tell you what, I'll teletype the motor vehicle department and get a check on your license. If it's okay, I'll let you go on your own recognizance."

"Very kind of you," Larkin said, and wondered why the Captain had waited so long to suggest this procedure.

O'Brien went into one of the offices beyond the end of the desk and Larkin could hear the clatter of a teletype machine. The Captain came back after a few moments.

"Won't take long. Have another apple."

Richard picked out a solid one, big as his fist. "Thanks. I was going to eat on the plane. Didn't stop for lunch today."

O'Brien sat down on a high stool behind the desk. "I'd hate to be that busy. Oh, now and then this place lets loose. Times when you think the whole city's gone crazy, but other times it's quiet, like now. Saturday nights used to be tough—Saturday nights and holiday eves. Changed lately—maybe not for the better—but at least the action is spread out."

Part of the day squad came in to report off duty. Each man deposited something in the gray helmet. This group was followed by another, the early squad getting ready to go on duty. Nobody said a word, no one was told to deposit money in the hat, but not a man missed—although one fumbled and got red-faced and finally borrowed a dollar from Captain O'Brien.

Half a dozen men accepted O'Brien's invitation to have an apple and the contents of the bag dwindled rapidly. The probation officer came from a back room.

"A pack of nonsense," he said. "Carl was hungry and broke. He wasn't trying to cash in on anything so he could get the fare to Medford. Sergeant Prince ought to be ashamed of himself. What's in the bag?"

"Apples. Have one." O'Brien proffered the bag. The probation officer munched one of them, nodded in satisfaction. O'Brien said, "Take some home to the kids."

"Don't mind if I do." The probation officer stuffed four apples into his coat pockets until they bulged. He moved in his brisk manner toward the door. "Talk to Sergeant Prince, will you, Terry? If nobody's pressing a charge—let the boy go."

"We'll see," O'Brien said. "He'll be taken care of. Say, Jim, what's the kid supposed to have stolen?"

"Apples," the probation officer said, with the expression of an imp. "A large bag of apples."

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O'Brien looked into the bag. "Two left. What do you say, Mr. Larkin?"

Richard shook his head. "Really, they're very big, and I'm having trouble finishing this one."

"Better have another," O'Brien said. "Only two left—and then we throw the sack away. I've had four myself."

Richard accepted the apple and returned to the bench to sit down. He was well aware of what was happening. From the room where the teletype machine was located came a pinging sound.

"That'll be about your license," O'Brien said, and walked into the room. He came back reading the strip of paper torn from the machine. He shook his head.

"Complications, Mr. Larkin. Your driver's license expired four months ago and it hasn't been renewed."

Richard suddenly felt like a man charged with a serious crime. "Oh . . . oh, I did forget. I'm sorry—busy, you know . . ."

"I'll need bail now," O'Brien said. "Rules. Phone anyone you like."

Richard was considering putting an end to the whole business by calling the Mayor, but he had no time to set this idea into motion. A burly, uniformed sergeant came in, red-faced and angry.

"I met Jim," he said to O'Brien. "He had the nerve to ask me to drop the charge against that kid."

"Well, what is the charge?" O'Brien took a giant bite from the last apple. For some reason Richard did the same with his apple, and the crunching sounds made Sergeant Prince look around.

"That kid lifted a whole bag of apples. From Bergellini's store. A whole bag of them, put up for a customer. Okay, so it wasn't much, but the law is the law . . . Say, what happened to that bag of apples? Who took them?"

O'Brien seemed stunned. "Was that the bag left here on the desk?"

"Well, where else . . . ?" Prince shouted.

"We thought somebody made us a present of them, Sergeant. They're all gone. Eaten up."

Richard couldn't help it. "Delicious too," he said, and wiped some of the juice off his chin.

Sergeant Prince waited almost a full minute. He hardly breathed during that time and his red face grew redder and redder. "I think it was a trumped-up job. Those apples were evidence. So all right . . . so you ate 'em. Wise guy stuff—so I'll have Bergellini make me up another bagful . . ."

"And you'll swear those are the ones the boy swiped? Sergeant, that'd be perjury. The law's the law. You said so yourself."

Prince gave up. "Okay, okay, let's forget the whole thing."

"That's decent of you, Sergeant. The kid was just hungry," O'Brien said. "All that kid wants is to go

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live in Medford so he can be near his mother."

"Well, I hope he makes it," Prince said, and began moving away. O'Brien murmured something. Prince glanced at the upturned hat, dug furiously into his pocket, popped a bill into the hat, and walked out. Richard found some old paper, wrapped the apple core in it, and disposed of it. O'Brien picked up one of the telephones.

"Send Carl out."

A gangling boy came from one of the back rooms. He was almost six feet tall, all arms and legs and yellowish, unruly hair. O'Brien went to the end of the desk and dumped the money out of the old helmet. He counted it. There was no silver, only bills. He stacked them, tucked them into an envelope, handed it to the boy.

"Okay, Carl," he said. "You take the next bus to Medford. In three more days you'll be old enough to get your working papers. I suggest you find a daytime job and go to school nights. This money will hold you for a while, but if things don't break let me know. Phone collect. All right?"

"Yes, sir," the boy said. "I'll pay it all back. That's a promise."

"We'd rather you stayed out of trouble than pay anything back. Go on now—beat it. Want to miss the bus?"

Richard was almost bowled over by the tall boy as he went out. Richard leaned against the brass rail and felt at home, as if he'd been here for weeks.

"Could I ask what this is all about?"

"The apples? We made a mistake. We ate the evidence."

"I know. I was implicated in that maneuver. I mean the hat."

"Oh—Callahan's hat. Well, it's simple enough, Mr. Larkin. Callahan used to be a cop here in town many years ago. He was a big, burly Irishman with a big, burly heart. When anybody was in trouble, he'd take off his helmet, hold it in one hand, his nightstick in the other, and he'd tour the saloons and suggest the hat be filled with cash. Well, Callahan died, but we thought the idea of the hat wasn't bad. So ever since, we just set it down there at the end of the desk whenever we want donations."

"But not one man who donated even asked what it was for?"

"A cop knows all about hard luck and suffering, Mr. Larkin. He's not interested in who, just that somebody needs it."

"And how many times a year does this happen?"

"A year? Couldn't say. Once or twice a week, maybe . . ."

"Police officers don't make that kind of money, Captain."

"They get by. At least they're better off than the people they donate for. It's just a small thing. Traditional, I suppose you might say. Been going on for fifty years."

Richard went back and sat

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down. Ten minutes later Diane arrived with his wallet. Richard handed over fifty dollars for bail, but there was still the question of his expired license.

"I guess I made a mistake," Diane apologized. "I had my license all the time. I'm terribly sorry, Mr. Larkin. But I didn't have the cash for your bail. I went as fast as I could . . ."

"It's all right," Richard said. He tucked the wallet into his pocket. "Tell me, Captain, you were using Callahan's hat to take up a collection for Carl quite some time before you began to distribute the bag of apples. By accident, of course. Now —how did you know Carl would go free so that he could use the money collected in the hat?"

"That's a pretty good question," O'Brien said. "Shows understanding. But would you mind clearing out now. The evening squad's coming down and soon as I get them on their way, I can go home. I'm glad you dropped in, Mr. Larkin. You too, Miss."

They were at the door when he called out to them. "See to it the young lady drives, Mr. Larkin—and have that license of yours renewed."

Richard nodded, took Diane's elbow, and led her out to where his car was parked. She slid behind the wheel and started the motor.

"I'll have you at the airport in plenty of time for the next plane," she said.

"Never mind, Miss Kehoe. I'm not going—not right now. Drive to the Club Arnold—we're going to have dinner. There are several things I want to say to you and I'll need candlelight to say them. Do you like candlelight?"

"Oh, most definitely, Mr. Larkin."

"Good. And I want to look at you—really look at you. I think I've missed a great deal by not looking at you, Miss Kehoe. And I've a confession to make—I'm going to accept that job on the Police Board."

"My father always told me it's the equal of a college education to spend a few hours in a police station, Mr. Larkin. And I've a confession to make too. I knew I had my driver's license with me."

"You're fired, Miss Kehoe," he said.

"I was afraid of that," she said.

"I'm going to marry you," he said.

"Well," she said, "it's still a bit early for dinner at Arnold's and out near the airport there's a nice place to stop for a while where a man can ask a girl in the proper way to marry him and maybe back it up with a kiss or two—if you're so inclined, Mr. Larkin."

"I am so inclined," he said, "but take it easy. It's good to slow down once in a while and look around. Besides, one speeding ticket's enough for one day. They lead to all sorts of complications."

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**MAURICE PROCTER**
TITLE:	***The Policeman and the Lamp***
TYPE:	Detective Story
DETECTIVES:	Constable Wade—and an amazing helper
LOCALE:	Utterborough, England
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*An unusual and delightful tale that bridges the past and the present . . . how Constable Wade discovered that there is no place for magic in this modern world.*

STUDENTS OF ENCHANTMENT WILL be interested to learn that as recently as this year the Lamp was located in the British Isles, in the industrial town of Utterborough.

The circumstances of its appearance were not auspicious. The English are temperamentally opposed to any sort of enchantment, and their industrial regimen is quite destructive to it. The Lamp was in serious danger until it was rescued by the police constable and eventually restored to its custodian.

The invaluable object had been thrown away by a young woman when she was sorting the property of a recently deceased maiden lady, whose only heir she was. For many years the lady had lived in comfort, apparently with no income at all, in a flat above some offices in King Street, Utterborough. She left no money, but the furnishings of her flat were priceless.

Her disappointed niece, an uncultured person, thought that they were too old-fashioned to be of any value. She hastily packed the articles that seemed to be salable and sent them to an auctioneer, and threw the remainder into the back yard. The Lamp lay on a pile of rubbish in a bin without a lid. But for the action of P. C. Wade it would certainly have been collected by the dustmen, to be pressed and melted as scrap brass.

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Wade was on night duty, examining lock-up property around King Street, when he found the Lamp. The electric beam of his own Wootton Lantern seemed to linger on it. He picked it up and observed its arabesque design. Like the girl who had discarded it, he thought that it was "old-fashioned." But, though he was what is called an uneducated man, he was endowed with natural good taste and he rather liked the look of it.

He began to clean the Lamp with a sheet of newspaper. He held the paper crushed in his hand, and the tip of one of his fingers rubbed against the metal. There was the usual swirl of aromatic dust, and the Slave of the Lamp materialized. He greeted his new Master with a deep salaam.

Since the Slave is ten feet tall by English measurement, and powerfully built, there can be no doubt that the policeman received a shock. It is reported that he ran backward for several paces, and that the way in which his baton appeared in his hand was itself almost magical. Of course, the Slave bade him fear not his servant.

Occult sources from which this account is largely obtained state that when Wade had recovered his poise he thought—since it was the only non-magical conclusion possible—that he was momentarily sleeping and dreaming while habit and necessity kept him balanced on his feet.

"I'm surprised at you, George," he heard himself saying with mock severity. "Going about in a bathing suit with a towel round your head. You're improperly dressed. Go and get some clothes on."

"I hear and obey," said the Slave. He vanished, and Wade supposed that he was fully awake. "Coo," he breathed. "That *was* a nightmare."

Then he remembered a story that he had seen in pantomime at a theater, and he perceived that the object in his hand was indeed an ancient lamp. He shivered suddenly as he felt that cold unearthly wind which all true magicians know. He rubbed the Lamp cautiously, and the Slave reappeared, splendidly attired in the full uniform of a chief constable.

"Here," Wade said nervously, as he began to realize what an extraordinary thing was happening to him, "you can't wear that uniform. It's an offense. You'll get locked up."

"The Master is displeased?" asked the Slave in his deep voice.

"Er, not exactly. But I'd rather you went and changed into plain clothes. A decent suit and a trilby hat, like."

The Slave became a whirling dust-devil; then he reappeared in the required dress.

"That's right," said the constable approvingly. "My word, you're a smart figure of a man."

"The Master is pleased," said the genie with satisfaction. "What is

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his further wish? Doth he desire a guarded palace and a harem such as the caliphs only dreamed about? With many musicians and dancing girls, and much fruit and wine?"

Wade was considering this traditional offer when he heard the impatient tapping of Inspector Hostler's stick out in King Street. He looked at his watch and realized that he ought to have made his point five minutes ago. He made a certain wish concerning the inspector, but he remembered, just in time, not to utter it.

The tapping came nearer. Wade peeped round the corner of the yard and saw Hostler standing in the light of a street lamp at the entrance.

"I wish Inspector Hostler was up at the Cattle Market, tapping his stick for somebody else," he said carefully. The Slave vanished—and so did Hostler.

Wade put the Lamp in his tunic pocket and wandered round his beat, smoking his pipe and meditating on the things that are not dreamed of in man's philosophy. He realized that he would have to be careful how he spoke in the presence of the genie. A few minutes ago he had nearly dispatched the Inspector to hell, and Hostler was a decent man with a wife and three children.

Then again, Wade saw the need to be explicit. The creature did not seem to know his business with regard to the police. It was tactless of him to show up in a chief's uniform like that. He would have been in serious trouble if Hostler had seen him.

Then there was the offer of a palace and dancing girls. That was impossible. Where could it be built? Every square inch of England was owned by somebody. There would be some awkward business about trespass and ground rent, and a Ministry investigation to find out where all the building material had come from, and sightseers and newspaper photographers. Somebody would peep inside and see the girls in their muslin pants, and then it would be raided as a disorderly house. Mrs. Wade might find out about it, and that would be terribly awkward.

The constable's thoughts turned —as they often did—to the question of his own promotion, which he considered to be long overdue. He doubted if the genie could help him with that, because it would have to be decided by the chief constable and the Watch Committee.

Still, there was no harm in asking. He looked up and down the street, then went into the opening between the Midland Bank and the Prudential Chambers. He rubbed the Lamp, and the Slave appeared.

"George," said Wade, "can you alter people's minds?"

"I have no control over the souls of men, O Master," was the reply.

"I didn't think you would have. Thanks, I just wanted to know."

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The inspector's stick sounded again. Wade nearly said, "Blast the man."

"Take Inspector Hostler to the Cattle Market again, if you please, and come back here," he said.

"I hear and obey," answered the Slave. He vanished, and returned.

"I could do with some money," said the P.C. "Go and put a hundred one-pound notes into the pocket of my best greatcoat. It's in a wardrobe in the front bedroom of my house. And mind you don't awaken the wife. She'd die of fright if she saw you."

The rest of the night's tour of duty was uneventful. Wade was not an imaginative or demanding person, and he did not touch the Lamp again. He was only visited once by his sergeant, and once by Inspector Hostler, who seemed annoyed and upset about something.

When he went home in the morning he stood on a stool in the scullery and put the Lamp on the highest shelf, among his paint brushes and tins of patent fertilizer. Upstairs, he felt in his greatcoat pocket to make sure of the money, and went to bed.

He awoke at two o'clock in the afternoon. When he was dressed he went down into the living-room, where his wife and his dinner awaited him.

Mrs. Wade was buxom and thoroughly domesticated. "Eeh," she said, "I've had a funny feeling all morning. As if there were somebody else in the house besides you."

"Johnny's at school, isn't he?" Wade inquired.

"Course he's at school."

"Well, then," said Wade.

"I know," she replied. "But it's a funny feeling."

He wondered if the Slave remained near the Lamp, invisible, when he was not wanted. He would be able to watch everything. It was an embarrassing thought. "I'll have to stop that caper," he decided.

After dinner he went into the garden, where he sat on an old chair in the sunshine, smoking and pondering.

The Lamp was a handy thing, he concluded, but the possession of it had certain disadvantages. For instance, he dared not take his wife into his confidence. She would pester him until he summoned the genie for her to see, and when he appeared she would scream the house down. Her distrust in the creature would be unshakable, and she would be unhappy about every one of the benefits that he brought.

It was all awkward, very awkward. Wade put aside a dream of a handsome new car, because his wife knew that they could not afford any sort of car.

At that moment a car did stop at his gate, and his wife called out to him, "C.I.D."

It was Detective-Sergeant Brown from headquarters.

"We thought we'd let you have

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your sleep out," he said with a smile. "There was a breaking on your beat last night. The Midland Bank. Did you notice anything unusual?"

Wade immediately thought about the genie. His dismay must have shown in his face, but Brown expected that. Any policeman is dismayed when he has failed to find a break-in.

"Don't you worry," the detective said. "There are no marks which you should have noticed. We think it's a duplicate-key job, and we're interrogating the staff. It's the rummest job you ever saw. The strong-room left wide open, but only a hundred quid missing. Somebody must have disturbed the thieves. Inspector Hostler perhaps. He says he had a feeling there was something queer going on around there last night."

"I'm sorry," said Wade. "I saw nothing. I can't help you at all."

Brown went away. Wade waited until his wife was upstairs, then he went into the scullery and rubbed the Lamp. The genie appeared, almost filling the tiny room.

"You stole that hundred pounds," Wade accused.

"The Master required it," the Slave answered simply. "Gold and jewels can be conjured, but not the wealth that is made of paper. Such paper is but a token of riches, but each piece hath a number. If your Slave made it, it would not be even a token."

"I see your point," said the policeman. "But you mustn't steal. You'd better nip back to the Midland Bank and push those tokens through the letter box."

"I hear and obey," said the Slave, fading rapidly.

Wade went upstairs. The money was no longer in the wardrobe. He sighed with relief.

That incident was not without good results. It gave the constable an idea. He decided that he would have a super-policeman to keep his beat clear of crime. He took the Lamp on duty with him that night, and when he had turned out on his beat he called the Slave and gave him his instructions.

"George," he said. "I want you to float round my beat all the time I'm on duty. I'll make contact with you regularly. You can report to me everything that happens, but I don't want you to interfere in anything unless I seem to be in difficulties. Is that clear?"

"It is clear, O Master," the genie replied.

Master and Slave worked together for the remainder of that fortnight's spell of night duty. Wade was lucky—normally he would have thought he was unlucky—in having a case of shop-breaking on his beat. The vigilant genie called him to the shop just as three men were escaping with hundreds of pairs of nylon stockings.

The men dropped their parcels and attacked Wade. He overpow-

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ered one of them without much trouble, and the other two never knew what had hit them. He was complimented by the bench, and his name appeared in the newspapers under such headlines as: "Lone P.C. knocks out three."

During those nine or ten nights he also had several less important captures, due to the genie's assistance. He arrested a man who had broken a plate-glass window in drunken exhuberance, and he caught a man driving away a motor car without the owner's permission. Also, he reported the licensee of the Fighting Cocks Inn for supplying intoxicating liquor during non-permitted hours, and sundry customers for consuming the liquor. The licensee still believes that there was a spy among the customers, because *somebody* must have unbarred the door for the police to enter.

The Slave quickly acquired a basic knowledge of police work, and he increased it by reading over Wade's shoulder as the constable wrote his reports. There is proof that he was susceptible to environment, because one night at the end of those two weeks he completely changed his form of address. He appeared before Wade and saluted in the correct military manner, and said, "Sir, I beg to report that there is a blue Morris saloon, CYK 3979, proceeding towards us from the direction of Sisters Road. There appears to be an offense of failing to display two obligatory white lights to the front, under the Road Vehicles Lighting Regulations, 1936, Section One."

"Now, that's a lot better than bowing and scraping, George," replied Wade with approval. "But we won't bother with the car. Is there anything else?"

"There is the man James Smith, alias Jimmy the Jumper, loitering in the alley behind the Jubilee Wine Stores. He appears to be considering the possibility of climbing to an upper window."

"Good work, old boy," said the policeman. "We'll go and investigate."

It will be seen that the genie, though intelligent, had certain deficiencies. He could not tell the difference between a minor offense and a serious crime. Until he had listened to the court proceedings a few times, he seemed to think that all offenders, from highway robbers to keepers of dogs without licenses, were summarily strangled by bowstring and thrown into the Utter.

Nevertheless, he was invaluable to Wade. The policeman even used him on day duty, though he had to be very careful about his appearances. A few people saw him, looked again and saw nobody, and believed that they had been mistaken.

When Wade had been using the genie as an auxiliary policeman for two months there was a Watch

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Committee meeting at which several promotions were to be made. There were many eligible officers, and Wade was not among those chosen. But someone mentioned his name, and soon it was on every committeeman's lips. After much discussion his name was put on the list and he was promoted.

As a sergeant, Wade had half the town to patrol, and with the Slave's help he could have made many arrests. But he was discreet enough to put many of his cases into the hands of keen young constables. At that time, too, he employed the genie at home. In a piecemeal and unobtrusive way he had curtains and carpets renewed, and furniture repolished. His wife thought that the gloss on the furniture was the result of her chronic efforts with beeswax and a cloth.

With the magic of the Lamp, Wade could perhaps have heaped benefits on mankind. But he lacked imagination, and though he was not unduly selfish his outlook was limited by years of police routine.

So he confined his kindnesses to people with whom he came in contact. Poor people, elderly people, needy widows, and mothers of large families discovered stocks of food or small amounts of silver money which they thought they must have overlooked. At no cost to himself, Wade enjoyed the satisfaction of giving.

Wade's personal demands remained moderate. When he needed tobacco or money—never more than a handful of silver—he summoned the Slave and asked for it. The latter, under the iron—or rather brass—discipline of the Lamp's enchantment, made no protest about having to materialize for such trivial reasons, though he did once shed angry tears when he was called upon to supply a box of matches in the middle of the night.

It must be remembered that he was a jinni, a devil. He constantly hoped that Wade would ask him to produce a lovely houri, or order the violent death of an enemy, and Wade constantly disappointed him. When he wept, the policeman thought that he was tired because he had been handling boxes of groceries all day, so he gave him a two-day leave.

About a week later, at five forty-five one sunny morning, there occurred one of those incidents which can happen to policemen at any time. A man entered Utterborough Police Headquarters and complained that he had lost a wallet containing twenty pounds while he was rushing to the station to catch the first train. He had seen nobody except a few policemen, and he remarked, rather apologetically, that he felt sure one of the policemen must have picked up the wallet.

Wade was alone in the sergeants' office at the time, making up the following night's postings, and through the letter hatch to the in-

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spectors' office he heard Inspector Hostler receive the complaint. The worthy inspector was extremely proud and jealous of the force's reputation, and he was infuriated by the mere suggestion that a policeman might dishonestly keep the wallet.

"When the men come in at six o'clock," he boomed, "we'll ask every one of them, including myself, to submit to a search. I hope that will satisfy you."

Wade immediately thought of the Lamp in his pocket. He could not put it in his drawer because that would be searched too. If Hostler found the Lamp he would rub it to see what it was made of. He would see the genie and make shrewd guesses about Wade's smart captures and his own transportation to the Cattle Market. That would be awful.

In a panic Wade looked around for a place to hide the Lamp. But the little office was too tidy. A police station has no place for magic.

At any moment, he knew, the inspector might come striding indignantly into the room. He took the Lamp from his pocket and summoned the Slave.

"Here," he whispered urgently. "Take this and hide it somewhere."

The Slave took the Lamp in his hands and smiled enigmatically.

"Go on," whispered Wade urgently. "Fade!"

And the genie faded.

It was a pity really, because it was afterward discovered that the complaining civilian had left his wallet at home. Not until the search was over did Wade realize that he would never see the Lamp again.

He went into a quiet corner of the police-station yard and called for the genie as loudly as he dared. For answer, he heard a sound that began like a chuckle and ended like a roll of thunder in the clear morning sky.

He was afraid to call again. He went away, trying to convince himself that he would be better without the Lamp. He had always been rather uncomfortable about it, he remembered.

There was no place for magic in his world.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Number 23 in our new series of "first stories" . . . "The Killing of Phil" is different from all the other "first stories" we have been bringing to you. It is told strictly in the vernacular, with what might be called a Runyonesque point of view.

The author is in his late forties. He received his education at Harvard, Boston University, and Emerson. For the past 25 years he has been teaching English and creative writing on both the high school and college levels. For 24 of these years he "contemplated" writing on his own, and then in the summer of 1960 he "exploded."

EQMM was happy to provide Mr. McLaughlin with his first fiction sale—as we are happy to help every newcomer, young and old, to break into print. Again we repeat our cordial and sincere invitation: send in your stories—of detection, crime, or suspense—EQMM's editorial doors are wide open to all writers in the mystery field—especially to beginners everywhere. You are the lifeblood of the future, and EQMM wants to discover you!

THE KILLING OF PHIL

by JOHN F. McLAUGHLIN

"PHIL, YOU SHOULDN'T OUGHT TO beat up Bette like that," I says. He always looked on me like a little punk. He didn't realize that I was real upset.

"Look," he says, giving me the fish-eye treatment, "she's my wife, and what goes on between her and I is strictly my business."

"Yeah, and she's my sister, too," I replies, "and that makes it my business, also." Phil looked surprised. I never acted tough with him before.

"What's the matter? You drunk or something? Blow," he tells me, opening the front door. "And get this straight, don't you never come back here!"

As I walked out, I could hear Bette from their bedroom, kind of gasping and crying at the same time. "Don't you worry no more, kid," I whispered to myself. "Hunchy's going to take care of you from now on. This heel will get what's coming to him one of these days. I don't forget what you done for me when nobody else would do nothing."

In fact, you might say that I was one of the chief causes of the trouble between Bette and Phil Morton. She used to sneak over and visit

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me when I was in stir, and she hardly ever missed a visiting day. The rest of the family wouldn't have nothing to do with me.

Not that I can blame them much. From the time I was old enough to know what a race was, I spent most of my time in betting parlors and poolrooms, or at the track. I got bit by the bug early, and I wasn't able to get the habit off my back even if I wanted to, which I didn't.

I'm strictly what is known as a hunch player—that's where I get my nickname from, Hunchy. Everyone who plays the nags plays them by form or hunch. A hunch never loses at a track—if you read it right. The reason hunch players lose sometimes is they don't figure the hunch exactly right.

It was a hunch that sent me up the river—that's how much I believe in them. I got this hunch when I was working as a pearl-diver in a hash house. I borrowed eighty bucks from the till to play on a nag that had the same handle as the guy who owned the joint. This was a cinch bet—but I never collected because I was collared while I was laying the bet, and thrown in the clink. I pulled three years because I happened to be on pro at the time.

Like I said, Bette was the only one that stood by me. Phil was against it. When he found out that she was visiting me, he gave her a warning of what would happen to her the next time. When the next time came, he beat her up so bad she had to go to the hospital.

About this time I got out with a couple of months off for good behavior, but nobody wanted to give me a job. This is when Bette comes to my rescue again. Phil had been calling her up begging her to come back, and saying he was a reformed character and all that garbage. So finally, Bette said she would come back to him on the condition that he gets me a job at Lombardi's meat-packing plant, where Phil was the bookkeeper.

Even though Phil hated my guts, he wanted Bette back so much that he wangled me a job as janitor at Lombardi's. It was a lousy job, but I needed some cash to keep playing my hunches, so I took it. Then come that night six weeks later, when I happened to drop in at Bette's just after Phil give her a going-over. All in all, Phil led her a pretty miserable life because he didn't like to be crossed in nothing, and she could never tell when he might flip.

You can see from all this that I owe Bette a lot, and I decided that the best way I could pay her back would be to get rid of Phil for her. I decided that the next beating he give her would be the last—he wouldn't be alive to do it again. At first I was worried about what would happen to me if I got caught, but then I worked out a plan where no one could ever pin anything on me.

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I almost forgot about the whole thing because for quite a while afterward Phil seemed to be the reformed character he was always promising Bette he would be. But one night I am coming out of a bookie's and I see Bette sitting in her car waiting for a green light. I hadn't seen her for a while, so I yells, "Hey, kid!"

She turns and sees me, and says, "Hi, Hunchy. Come on, get in." So I jumps in the car, and she says, "How about a good home-cooked meal?"

I says, "Yeah, fine. But you're forgetting one little detail. How about Phil?"

She says, "Phil's okay now. He's calmed down a lot. I don't think he'd mind a bit."

So we drove over to her house, but as luck would have it, Bette, swerving so she wouldn't run over a cat in her driveway, scraped a fender on the side of the garage. This made quite a noise, and of course Phil come running out. When he saw the dented fender, he went nuts—plain nuts. Bette didn't say nothing, but got out of the car and walked into the house. Phil, raving like a loony, ran in after her. He was really mad about the car, but the fact that I was along didn't help any.

I could hear him from outside saying, "I told you I didn't want that ex-con brother of yours here again." And I hear a slap.

I ran into the house, and just as he was going to hit her again, I grabbed his arm, but he shook me off. I jumped on his back and the two of us crashed to the floor. Bette ran into the bedroom, and I heard the lock click in the door.

We wrestled for a minute, but I managed to break away and beat it. Phil chased me as far as the front gate. When I stopped up the street to catch my breath, he was over by the car, checking on the damage.

I knew this was it. Bette would never live this down, and I decided that Phil must go. I went back over the plans I made, and they seemed pretty good and safe. I decided that I'd do it real soon, but that I'd wait for a good hunch to come along and tip me off to the right time.

Two days after the accident I got it. I see the name of a horse and that gives me the green light for the whole operation. This was a twist—getting a hunch from a horse, instead of the other way round.

The horse's name was Philip Day. Get it? Philip's day—Phil's day—to die, that is. I know I might never get such a hunch as this for a long time, so I decided to carry it out that day.

Regular at three o'clock every day, Phil used to go out to get some coffee for himself and the girls at the office. He always went downstairs, past the locker room, and out the back way. I sneaked a knife they'd never miss from the slaughter shop, and put on a pair of slaughterhouse coveralls. I took

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from a big hamper waiting to go to the laundry.

When Phil walked by, I was waiting for him, and let him have it from behind. He didn't even grunt, just went limp, and I dragged him a couple of feet over under a shower. There never was anybody near the locker room at that time of day, but I scouted around just to make sure. Everything looked good.

Phil didn't bleed much, and I wrapped him up in a burlap covering they use for the beeves when they hang them up to season. I knew a little about this because part of my job was to help the cold-storage men sometimes. I fastened the burlap together with pegs till Phil was completely hid, and he looked like any other piece of beef. I had put the knife inside with the body.

Except for Phil, not a living soul had passed that way. I lifted the body onto a dolly, then I went back and run the water in the shower to get rid of any stains. Down the corridor was the seasoning room, where they was about a hundred burlap-covered beeves hanging up, ready for market.

I wheeled Phil down to this room, opened the heavy door, and stepped inside. Of course, the temperature here was below freezing. Near the middle of the room I seen an empty hook. I knew that hardly nobody come in there during the afternoon, so I could give all my time to hanging Phil up.

This was a job, but I finally made it. Then I took the dolly back to the locker room, threw the coveralls back into the hamper, picked up my broom, and started to sweep just as if everything is normal.

Phil was missed about an hour after he didn't come back with the coffee. I heard a couple of clerks talking about it, and they said Lombardi was pretty sore. When closing time came, and he still didn't show, someone called his house, but of course, Bette hadn't seen him.

Finally, we all went home, and I smiled to myself. Another hunch had paid off, and so far I was in the clear. I say "so far" because I couldn't leave Phil where he was for long—in a couple of days the seasoning room would be cleaned out by meat orders. But I had plans to get rid of the body the next night.

Lombardi's worked only a day shift, so it was empty at night except for two watchmen. One come on duty at four and worked till twelve. The other worked from twelve to eight when the janitor, which is me, takes over. The regular men get to work about half-past eight.

When Jackson, the watchman of the first shift, come in, I went up and asked him if he would let me borrow a truck that night, so as I could haul away some folded cardboard cartons I could sell for salvage. He put up an argument about the truck, but he was a soft old guy, and he finally gives in like I figured he would.

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"Okay, Hunchy," he says. "I guess it will be all right. Knock on the shipping room door at eight o'clock. I'll just be pulling a box there then."

By this time Bette had called the cops about Phil being missing. A couple of them come over to the plant and asked the usual questions, and they got exactly nothing for their trouble. But then, they didn't act too interested. Lots of guys disappear every night and then turn up again. I knew if they suspected anything real bad I would be the first one they talked to, me having done time.

At eight that night Jackson let me into the shipping room. He gave me a big production about me being back by nine thirty, then he goes back to the office to eat his lunch.

The first thing that I did was to get a load of folded cardboard cartons and pile them on the shipping platform near where I had backed up a truck. Then I got a dolly and went to the cold-storage room. Seeing all them beeves in the light of my flashlight spooked me so much that I almost run out. But I calmed down, and finally managed to get Phil off the hook—first making sure that it was him.

I dragged the burlap bundle onto the dolly, which I pushed down a few ramps till I come to the truck. It was almost dark now, and nobody was walking anywheres near the plant, so I dump Phil in the truck and throw the old cardboard on top of him. Then I open the main gate, drive the truck out, go back and slam the gate, and drive off down the street. I returned at half-past nine with an empty truck.

On my way to my rooming house, I could see Bette's house down the street with all its lights on. I hadn't called on Bette since Phil disappeared, so I thought it might look good if I dropped in. I had decided not to tell Bette about Phil—she's got a delicate stomach and she might get upset to hear that her husband was bumped off by her own brother.

When I get near the house I could see a squad car pulled up at the front door. I was going to keep walking, but I seen the number of the squad car was Five. That's my lucky number—Five. So, on the hunch, I went up and rang the bell.

It turns out two dicks are in there. One of them answered the door. He knew me. "Oh," he says, "it's you, Hunchy. Come in. You saved us the trouble of going over to your place."

"What for?" I asks, innocent-like. "Oh, you mean about Phil. Any word, Bette?"

Bette's eyes, believe it or not, has tears in them. She shakes her head, and says, "No, Hunchy. And now these officers are trying to tell me that poor Phil could have met with foul play." She was actually worried about that crumb!

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"What about the accident the night before last, Hunchy?" asks the cop who knows me.

"Accident? What accident?" I looked at Bette, and she nods her head, meaning that she told the cops about it. "Oh, you mean the accident to the car. Well, in my opinion, it wasn't my sister's fault. If that damn cat—"

"We're interested in the fight," the other cop cuts in. "We understand that your brother-in-law struck your sister, and that you jumped him. Right?"

"What would you do if your sister was being clobbered by her husband?" I asks.

"Okay, okay," says the cop. "And then he chased you out of the house and on up the street. Right?"

"Right," I says. "Phil was—er—is lots bigger than me, and I didn't want to get creamed."

"And yet," says the cop, sounding just like a lawyer on TV, "knowing that Morton could lick you, you got so mad when he beat your sister that you didn't care what happened to you, and you jumped him. You must have quite a temper, Hunchy."

"So what," I snarls. "You bulls are all alike. As soon as you get stuck solving something, you try to put the pressure on some poor slob of an ex-con."

The other cop tried to calm me down. "Take it easy, Hunchy. Nobody's suggesting that you did nothing." He turned to his sidekick. "I'm betting Morton's one of them amnesia cases. Let's go down to headquarters and put out another all points on him."

The other cop, who's new to the precinct, turns to me and says, "Why do they call you Hunchy?"

The other dick answers for me. "This guy's a race-track psycho. He plays the nags by hunches."

I says, "Who's a psycho?"

The new dick speaks up and says, "So you're a dream-booker, huh? Very interesting. I'll remember that." Then he turns to Bette. "If, by chance, you hear anything, Mrs. Morton, call headquarters right away. I'm on this case from now on, so ask for me—Detective Larson."

When they was gone, Bette says, "Gee, Hunchy, you don't think they got any ideas about *us* having anything to do with Phil being missing?"

"Nah," I tell her. "They got to check everything out so they look like they're earning their salary, that's all. Just let them try to connect us with Phil's murder."

"Murder!" Bette almost shrieks. "Hunchy, *you* don't think somebody *killed* Phil, do you?"

I seen that I got to be more careful. "Now, Bette, that's the farthest thing from my thoughts. Look, you get a good night's sleep, huh? I'm betting he'll show tomorrow."

The next morning I bought a paper to read with my breakfast. Like always, I turn first to the Daily

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Horoscope. The news was definitely not good. Under January, which is the month my birthday comes in, it says, "This is going to be a hard day for Capricorners. Don't take any unnecessary risks." It's not very often that any horoscope is as bad as this. I almost decided not to go to the plant at all, but in the end I went.

Sure enough, there was a squad car at the door, and my heart flipped when I saw number Seven on the side of it. Seven for me is the most unluckiest number, bar none. I'd have to be very, very careful.

When I punched in, the late shift watchman was just ready to leave. He pointed to the main office, where two men were sitting. One was a stranger, the other was Larson. I figured they wanted to see me, so it would be better to go in of my own free will.

"Hello, Hunchy," says Larson, swinging back and forth in a swivel chair. "I was waiting for you."

"What for?" I asks, trying to sound as if it didn't matter.

"Meet Mr. Danski," says Larson. I looked at the other guy, who was an old man I never seen before. "I understand that before you talked to us last night, you took a little trip in one of the company's trucks."

"Now wait a minute," I says.

"No use denying it, Hunchy. Mr. Danski here told us all about it. He lives in an apartment facing the corner of Lombardi's yard, and he seen you dump something into a truck and drive off with it."

I was getting panicky, but I tried to control myself. I says, "Mr. Danski is off his rocker—he better have his eyes examined. Last night when I stopped in at my sister's house, I was coming home from a movie."

"There's nothing wrong with Mr. Danski's eyesight. As a matter of fact, Mr. Danski is a retired member of the Force, and he knows what he sees, from long experience."

"I don't care who he is," I blurts out. But I know I don't sound very sure of myself.

"Tell us what you seen, Mr. Danski," says Larson.

Danski sounded like he was in court on a case. He took out a notebook. "At approximately eight fifteen the accused—"

I yells, "Accused of what?"

Danski begins again. "At approximately eight fifteen the accused come out of Lombardi's plant, wheeling a side of beef wrapped in burlap, which he dumps into the truck he has parked there. Then he covers this up with some collapsed cardboard cartons and drives off. He returns to the main gate at nine twenty-eight, where he was left in by the night watchman. He parks the truck, goes out by the shipping room door, and walks down Third Street."

"And walks into his sister's

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house three minutes later," adds Larson. "All right, Hunchy. Who did you sell the meat to?"

The *meat!* Then all the time I only was suspected of heisting some beef! I was still in trouble, but not big trouble.

My mind went racing along to find something for me to say next, when they brought poor Jackson in. He stuttered out the truth and nothing but the truth. Of course, the poor old geezer denied that we were partners in any deal to jack some beef. He explained that he just wanted to help me get some cardboard salvage, and that the idea that I would steal anything never even entered his head.

"But he did take a truck out of here. You'll swear to that?" Larson asks.

"Sure," says Jackson. "He took a truck. I shouldn't of let him do it, but I felt sorry for him on account he's always broke from playing the races."

"Okay, Pop, wait outside." Then Larson turns to me. "All right, now. Let's not waste any more time. Where did you peddle it?"

From where I was sitting, I could see through the window a big billboard advertising a movie called "The River." I decided to play this hunch—what else could I do? I says, "I threw it into the river."

"What river?" bellows Larson. "There ain't no river in town!"

"The—uh—Dudley River." I names a river about fifteen miles away in the next town. "I was going to fence the beef, like you said, only I got panicky. I decided to get rid of it, so I threw it in the drink. Then I drove back and dumped the cardboard in my back yard."

Larson doesn't believe me, but they got to check things out. "First," he says, "I want to take a look at that cardboard you took. Then let's take a trip to the river."

We got into the squad car and drove to my rooming house where I had dumped the cartons in the back yard the night before. Larson and the cop who was driving pawed around the cardboard, but of course they didn't come up with anything. While they were wasting their time hunting there, I got to thinking about the Dudley River. I never been near the place since I was a kid when I went swimming a couple of times at a place called Pike's Wharf. This helped me out with the next question I figured Larson would throw at me.

"All right. Whereabouts on the river did you dispose of the beef?"

"Pike's Wharf," I answers, quick as a wink. At the minute, things weren't going too bad. Damn Mr. Danski and his prying! If it wasn't for him, nobody would have nothing on me.

I wasn't paying no attention to where the car was going, and after a while it stopped.

"Here's Pike's Wharf," says Larson. "So you dumped the meat off here, eh?"

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I looked out the car window. In the fifteen or so years since I been here, somebody's put up a chain link fence all around the wharf. It was at least twelve feet high.

"I thought this was the place," I answers—then I fell back on the old line.

"It's all confused in my mind. I must of blacked out when I got here."

"Let's go back to the station and see if we can light you up," snaps Larson.

When we get there, I was glad to see that the precinct number on the station was Five, my lucky number—and I sure can use it.

Larson was pretty smart for a cop. He even come up with the idea that Phil and me was working some kind of a racket together—that maybe Phil is away to make some contacts where we could unload the stolen beef. But I remind him that Phil and me ain't exactly friends.

He's sweating me for maybe a half an hour, and getting nowhere, when the Captain comes in and says, "All right, Larson, let this man go." I almost fell off the chair.

"Let him go?" Larson shouts. "Why?"

"Because he hasn't done anything," says the Captain. I thought I was hearing things. "Lombardi won't bring any charges against him because he has taken inventory in the cold-storage room and he says absolutely there's nothing missing—so no matter what Danski or this punk says, legally there has been no theft." The Captain was getting mad. "So let him go, and I don't want to hear any more about it." Good old Precinct *Five*.

As I was leaving, I turns to Larson and says, "No hard feelings, officer. I understand you just done your duty."

"Aw, shut up," he replies. "Hey, wait a minute—why was you so willing to own up to a caper you never pulled?"

"Me, I always go along with a gag," I says.

"Get the hell out of here!" almost screams Larson.

Well, believe it or not, Lombardi takes me back, and after that for about a week everything went normal. Pretty soon people stopped talking about Phil's mysterious disappearance, and it even started to fade from my mind.

Then one day, as I was sweeping the sidewalk in front of Lombardi's, a squad car pulls up—number Seven—and Larson steps out. At first he didn't say nothing—just pulled the broom from my hands and snapped on a pair of cuffs.

"Come on, Hunchy," he says then, "we're going for a little spin."

He took me downtown to headquarters and brought me into a little room. He says, "Now, Hunchy, there's a nice clean piece of paper and a pen. Just jot down the story of how you murdered Philip Morton and threw his body into a va-

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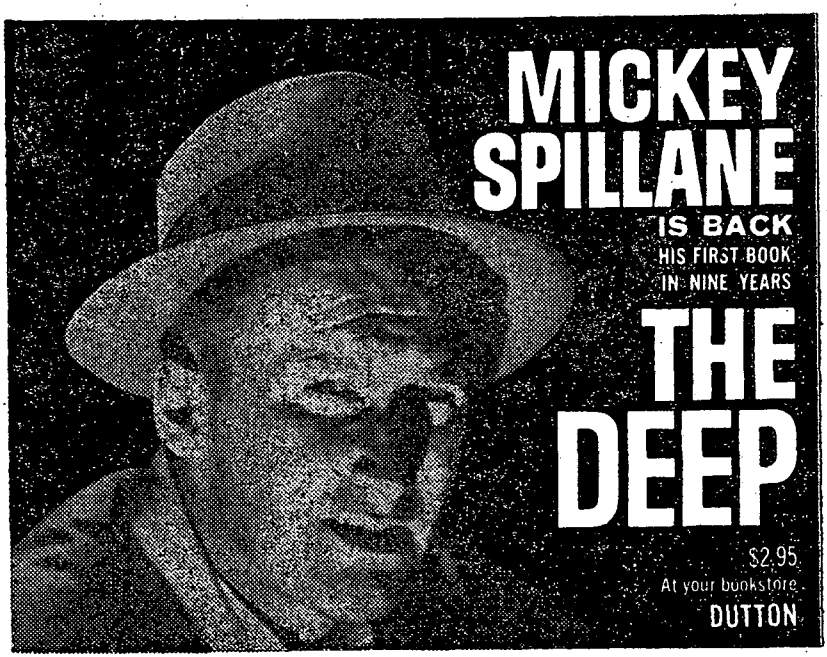
cant lot. When you get through, just sign your name to it."

"How did—how could—you find it?" I practically whispered.

"Just a question of time, Hunchy. Of course I believed you done it from the beginning—nobody else had your qualifications. But I knew I couldn't do anything about it until I found the body. I was pretty sure you wouldn't get rid of it anywheres unless you had a hunch it was the right place.

"So I been riding along every road you possibly could have taken that night, looking for something that might have given you a hunch. It dawned on me this morning when I came to that big lot they're trying to fill in on Dexter Street. I seen the sign you seen when you were looking for some place to get rid of Phil Morton's corpse. The sign in front of the lot—you remember, it said *DUMP FILL HERE*. Then it was only a question of digging."

Like I said, Larson was a smart cop. I picked up the pen and started to write.



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No editorial comment now — please read the story first . . .

A SLICE OF MISS WITTLES

by CLAYRE & MICHEL LIPMAN

DINNER, MISS CAYMONGER thought, had been everything Mr. Lippold promised. They really set an excellent table. Tonight's tossed salad was really good, the mashed potatoes oozed with butter, and the roast meat was better than any she had ever tasted. Wonderful food, a nice sunny room, unusual quiet—and all at an unbelievably modest rate. She was fortunate to find this place even though the Lippolds had insisted that she pay four months in advance.

The Lippolds weren't nosey either. Some families started questioning a new boarder right off. Mrs. Lippold and the boy hardly ever spoke, and Mr. Lippold made pleasantly innocuous remarks that didn't seem to require answers.

Arnold, the boy, spoke in an adenoidal way. "Could I have another slice of Miss Wittles, please?"

"Goodness!" Miss Caymonger said.

Mr. Lippold cut another slice of the roast meat, laid it alongside the mashed potatoes on the boy's plate, and ladled a spoon of gravy over it. "Arnold has a very vivid imagination. Miss Wittles was our last boarder—a bookkeeper for the railroad, I believe. Arnold didn't like her."

"He's spoiled." Mrs. Lippold said.

"The most recent application of psychology," Mr. Lippold went on, "is to encourage the channeling of built-up aggressions into harmless directions. Instead of letting these little rages and hostilities pile up inside. Eh, Mother?"

"He's spoiled," Mrs. Lippold said again.

Miss Caymonger moved back her chair.

"Oh, we're not through yet," Mr. Lippold said. "There's huckleberry pie and coffee." He frowned at his son. "Let's hurry along, Arnold, shall we? Dessert's waiting."

Miss Caymonger stood up. "I really don't think I can eat another bite, thank you." She put Miss Wittles firmly from her mind as the extreme oddness of this old-fashioned house came over her. It seemed suddenly that the Lippold family existed in the house, but did not live in it.

Mr. Lippold usually spent the day in the front room among his books, his wife at her rites in the kitchen, the boy at some sort of workshop in the cellar, or upstairs

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in the attic scratching around like a rat.

Miss Caymonger went to her room, remembering the queerness that had persisted from the time she had telephoned in response to a newspaper ad. Mr. Lippold had answered.

"We take only one room-and-board at a time and we want to be sure we're getting just the right person. We had a very nice lady but she left suddenly several weeks ago. If you'd like to call for an interview—"

She said she would, but had a great deal of trouble finding Judas Court. It was off Post somewhere, in the 1400 block. She had asked directions of a man in a brown smock at the produce stand, who stood twisting the greens from carrots, *crrk*, with his big hands, as though he were twisting necks and enjoying it in an absent-minded way. "Where can I find Judas Court, please?"

"Half a block back. This side of the street."

She went back half a block and there it was. Strange how she could have walked right by without seeing it.

There was a sign in front of the house. *Jules Lippold, Psychologist and Consultant.* Beside it was a card: *Room and Board.*

Mr. Lippold came to the door. He was wearing a sports jacket and polka-dotted green bow tie under his round pudgy face. His hair was beginning to thin, his stomach to bulge. He had shown her the room. It was nice. "Quiet," he assured her. His boy was not the noisy kind. He did not permit unnecessary noise in the house.

She said she'd take it, and they talked for a minute. Then she noticed the boy. He certainly had made no unnecessary noise getting into the room. He stood there, runt-sized, mouth half open, staring beadily at her legs. She started, felt her face grow warm. Absurd, she had thought, getting ruffled over a little fellow like that; and she turned her attention to Mr. Lippold's glowing description of his wife's Sunday veal Scallopini.

When Miss Caymonger looked again, the boy was gone.

It was deliciously quiet at the Lippolds'; the walls of the high, old-fashioned rooms seemed practically sound proof, she thought, as she worked in her room, making changes in the Greek course she expected to teach this fall.

It was one of those curious quirks of her life that she should be teaching Greek after the way she had been forced to learn it. Her father had been a noted scholar, and had made her read Plato before she could spell out The Little Red Hen. He was a cold, autocratic man to whom people were mere chemical engines with different faces for purposes of identification. Of his daughter he demanded everything —strict obedience, devotion, atten-

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tion—and gave her nothing. When he died she left Briarville over the protests of her distant cousin Muriel, who was pink and chubby and had four children about whom she constantly worried.

"But you can't live like that!" Muriel had protested. "Alone and all. Suppose something happens? I know how you are about writing—goodness, a body wouldn't know for ten years after if you were alive or dead!"

She thought about Muriel sometimes, and in her restless going from one city to another Miss Caymonger often intended to drop her a post card. But somehow she never had.

She was pretty well settled now. When Doctor Alderson returned from his vacation she would see him about that job at St. Christopher's. They had exchanged letters and he had indicated interest. If she didn't get a post there, she would somewhere else . . .

She rinsed a blouse and a pair of nylons in the washbasin, took a shower, put on a dressing robe, and started putting up her hair. It was almost nine. She placed a couple of small incense cones on a cigarette tray and touched a match. Tiny spirals of blue smoke arose, and her mind turned to the boy—Arnold.

She had been sitting on the sunporch this morning, reading, when the impulse had come to her to look up.

Arnold was standing there, his mouth open, and that curiously grownup look in his light blue eyes. He was standing in a rectangle of colored light that filtered in through the leaded piano-window.

Blue, red, yellow, purple, and green squares. The red ray was on his face and he looked as if there was a low-grade fire inside his head.

"Huh. You ain't really readin'. Those ain't words in that book."

Miss Caymonger's leather-bound volume closed with a loud pop. "This book," she said, enunciating very carefully, "is written in the Greek language."

Arnold must have moved because now blue light encircled his shoulders, making it seem as if there were ice inside his head.

"Huh. You can't read no Greek."

She opened her mouth and closed it. She drew a deep breath and then said, "You are a very rude little boy."

He continued staring at her, only now he was in a yellow spot and she could think of nothing there might be inside his head except banana squash.

She pulled her skirt snugly over her knees, and opened her book—at the wrong place.

"Huh."

When she looked up Arnold was gone. It beat anything how that child could get in and out of a room so quietly.

The child wasn't the only odd thing about the house. There was the feeling that, once inside the

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solid front door, you were in a different world, a different age. As though the city outside no longer existed. As though it had floated away leaving only the Lippolds' residence an island in a dark, tumultous sea.

Mr. Lippold had shown her around the first day. "To make you feel entirely at home," he had said. Carefully omitting any reference to the third floor attic—at least, she thought there must be an attic at the top of those stairs—or the cellar. Or a couple of rooms with obviously locked doors. The kitchen was an odd mixture of ancient and modern. A walk-in freeze box built into one corner. "We maintain a constant temperature of five below," he said. "Guarantees that our food is exactly the same as fresh."

She had stared hard at the wood-burning stove. "Mrs. Lippold believes there's nothing like wood for real old-fashioned flavor," he said smoothly.

Miss Caymonger looked around at the festoons of red peppers strung above the stove, at the faded litho of Cottage in Brittany with the attached calender still recording January, 1926, at the motor-driven meat-grinder, new and shining—and she said nothing.

Nor did she say anything about finding the psalm-book wedged between the bureau and wall of her room. Inside the front cover was written in a round, no-nonsense hand, *R. Wittles*. Hardly the sort of thing one would leave behind.

Miss Caymonger couldn't visualize leaving one of her own books behind, no matter how hastily she might have to move. When she thought enough of a book to own it, she was certainly going to take it with her if she had to turn the whole room apart to find it.

She found that she preferred to avoid the Lippolds whenever possible. Nothing that interferred with meal-times, of course. The food continued to be good, plentiful, and appealing, and Miss Caymonger wasn't at all disturbed by Mrs. Lippold's heavy silence, her husband's forced jollity, and Arnold's steady gaze on her over the rim of his milk glass.

Though she had to admit being a *bit* startled by the little monster's asking for "another slice of Miss Wittles, please." If she were his mother—she shivered at the very thought—she'd certainly box his ears for talking that way.

Miss Caymonger was a little sorry now she hadn't waited for the huckleberry pie. She lighted another pyramid of incense and took a book from the small shelf she had arranged and began to read.

The door opened soundlessly.

It was Arnold.

"Something's burnin' in here."

"Incense."

He wasn't listening. "I'm going to show you something in the cellar some day."

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The last place she ever wanted to go, she assured herself. She looked at him, grinning his sly old-man grin.

"How old are you, Arnold?"

"Nine. How old are you?"

"Thirty-one."

"I don't believe it."

"Whether you believe it or not, young man, you'll find it wiser to accept a woman's statement of her age without comment."

He didn't say anything. His light blue eyes never blinked in their uncommonly adult intensity.

"That stuff you're burnin' smells terrible."

"I'm sorry. I'm sure you'll find the air fresher outside." She pulled her robe closer about her, and turned to her book.

"Don't it make you sleepy?"

"No, Arnold. I'm not a bit sleepy." She had certainly never seen such an expression in a child's eyes.

"You are too. You are sleepy as anything."

"No," Miss Caymonger lied. "I— I'm not . . ."

When Miss Caymonger awoke, the sun was already touching the foot of her bed and she knew it must be after seven. She had slept hard and dreamlessly, evidently without moving a muscle, for she felt achy and a little sore.

She sat up, yawning, still tired, massaging shoulders and hips with her fingers. Then she rolled out of bed, showered, and dressed. Breakfast was at 7:30; it seemed rather early for a household where no one went to a job and never really seemed to do anything.

Then she remembered last night with sudden shock.

Arnold. His grin, his staring blue eyes, his adult look—a male look. She shivered.

Sleepy, you're getting sleepy, he'd said—and after that she remembered nothing.

Had she been—was it possible . . . Her mind rejected the thought angrily.

A nine-year-old boy couldn't have mastered hypnotism so well even if his father was some kind of consulting psychologist. Though, if Mr. Lippold was ever consulted by anyone, it certainly wasn't in the book-cluttered front-room-office in which he sat all day and part of every night.

Don't be such an utter fool, she told herself sternly. You're a grown woman. You can't let a child panic you.

She marched briskly downstairs.

The family was already seated. Mr. Lippold smiled at her. Mrs. Lippold glanced up apathetically. Miss Caymonger sat down and said unnecessarily, "I overslept."

Arnold shouted, "Haw!"

Mr. Lippold passed her a platter. "This is good country sausage." Then, "Arnold, we like to encour-

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age free expression, but shall we be a little less explosive in our manners?"

"He's spoiled," Mrs. Lippold said.

Miss Caymonger took three sausage patties, a generous helping of scrambled eggs, applesauce, and strawberry jam. The biscuits were hot, light, and fluffy, and the coffee just the way she liked it—with plenty of bite.

"Everything's delicious," she said, although the sausage was perhaps a little too highly spiced for her taste.

"Today I'm goin' into the earth," Arnold said, his voice croony and faraway. "'Way down, through the cave under the house, to Nobody Peoble."

Mr. Lippold leaned toward Miss Caymonger and said happily, "It's a kind of womb fantasy—the cave idea, you know. He really has a rich imagination. It wouldn't surprise me if he becomes a writer."

"Of comic books," Miss Caymonger said.

Mrs. Lippold sighed. "He's spoiled."

"At least," Miss Caymonger said drily, and went to her room where she worked on her syllabus and then decided to go shopping.

There was not a sound in the house when she came downstairs. She went along the hall and paused at the kitchen door. She could hear mouselike noises and the subdued clinking of pots and pans.

She thought of asking Mrs. Lippold if she wanted anything downtown but strangely the kitchen door was locked. She had never heard of anyone locking a kitchen door—she shrugged and left.

She shopped on Grant Avenue and Geary, and spent most of the afternoon at the Museum of Art. Not really thinking about anything. Somehow, her mind didn't want to think. Because if it did, it would come back to that strange house in Judas Court—and that stranger child.

Miss Wittles.

Why did she keep remembering the name of the boarder just before her?

Miss Wittles who worked for the railroad. She went to a telephone booth, called one railroad, then another. "Who? Wittles? Yes, we did have until about three weeks ago. She quit suddenly. We got a note saying she wasn't well and needed a higher altitude. No. There are no relatives shown on our records, and no forwarding address."

Miss Caymonger realized then she must have been scared for quite a while without knowing it.

She was aware of a changed atmosphere in the house when she returned about dinner time.

The Lippolds were gone.

At least, they seemed to be. There was a note on her door. *Mrs. Lippold and I have had to be gone for a few hours. Would you mind fix-*

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ing supper for yourself and Arnold? Everything is in the refrigerator. Lippold.

Automatically she went into the kitchen and looked. There were some cooked carrots and peas, something that might be stewed prunes in a plastic dish, two bottles of relish, some spaghetti from the previous night, and a jar of olives. And one small package shoved into a corner of the freezer unit, labeled in pencil, *Meat.*

She closed the door.

There wasn't a sound in the house. The image of Arnold, his blue eyes staring, came to her with a physical shock. He was here somewhere—waiting for his dinner.

Miss Caymonger went upstairs and locked herself in her room.

There was nothing to keep her from leaving the house right now. All she had to do was pack her bags and go. The four months' rent she had paid in advance had suddenly become unimportant.

She gathered an armful of books, dropped some, and stared around the room at her things. What did they matter anyway?

Arnold was somewhere in the house, thinking his un-little-boy-like thoughts and staring in her direction as if he were the magnet and she . . .

It was all so terribly clear now. Miss Wittles . . .

They always looked for adults—an adult Jack the Ripper, an adult Black Dahlia murderer—and never found him.

Had they ever looked for a child?

Children seemed so innocent. Little boys played with baseballs, trains—not with hypnotism.

And weren't there other crimes no one ever heard of? Horror conceived and committed in secret places, and never suspected even by the police . . .

It was getting dark. She had to pack. She had to get out. Quickly, before Arnold came.

She tried again to gather a few things, but her hands wouldn't obey her will. Had Miss Wittles been so terrified . . . in this same room . . . Had Arnold come to her so quietly and commanded her to sleep?

Miss Caymonger wished she knew more about hypnotism. They had touched on the subject in one of her college courses. It was used sometimes for deep psychotherapy. Although some authorities frowned on the practice. Dangerous, they said.

She picked up her purse, unlocked the door, and slipped into the dark hallway. She paused at the second-floor landing, staring into blackness below. The railing felt slick against her palms. A stair creaked loudly and she waited for the clogging beat of her heart to slow a little, but it didn't.

Another step. Another. There was a small scrabbling sound near her feet. A mouse, a bat, Arnold

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. . . desperation kept her from fainting.

The silence became even more oppressive when she reached the first floor.

Here, she thought. Here is where it will happen.

But nothing happened. No voice telling her to stop. No hand reaching out to touch her . . .

Miss Caymonger's fingers found the wood of the front door and her hand fumbled for the knob.

The knob was no longer there.

The sound that her throat made was probably not as loud as she thought. She might have known that Arnold would take care of all details.

Her lips moved, though she wasn't praying. She wished she had learned how.

Maybe she could manage to walk down this hall and face him—it might be easier than cringing here in the darkness, waiting for him to come and find her.

Miss Caymonger began to move.

Not walk exactly. Move with her hands on the wall for support. She saw the thin sliver of light under the dining-room door.

It wasn't really as difficult as she thought to push the door . . .

Arnold was at the dining-room table. In front of him was a glass pitcher, full of water, into which he was staring intently. "Huh," he said, without looking up.

She should have been sick. "Arnold," she whispered.

"Wait!" he commanded, continuing to stare raptly into the water pitcher. The moments were unendurably long. Finally he sighed and the faint touch of color left in his face was gone, leaving it more pasty-white than ever. "Now we'll go in the cellar."

Once in her life Miss Caymonger had known pity. Once Miss Caymonger had known love. Now Miss Caymonger knew terror.

Not of death. But of what would come before.

She was beyond screaming, beyond movement. Twice she tried to speak. The third time words came. "No. I'm not going in the cellar."

"Huh." He made noises in his throat and looked at her with his small hungry eyes.

"You're goin'," he said tonelessly, "in the cellar. You want to go. You think you don't but you do. Come!"

"No!" She covered her face with her hands, whimpering. She sensed that he had moved, risen from behind the table. With terror in every nerve and muscle of her body, she found herself moving toward him, obeying . . .

So close he could reach out—he *was* reaching out . . .

Anything—she could stand anything but that moist, pudgy hand on her flesh . . .

There was something hard, cold, and heavy in her grasp. She was bringing it down, striking out. His arm came up too late. The water pitcher didn't break. She put it care-

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fully back on the table, staring at the groaning figure on the carpet. He would revive in a few moments. And then . . .

She dragged Arnold into the kitchen. She would not have dreamed a small boy could be so heavy.

The door of the walk-in freezer squeaked as she opened it. The cold bit deep into her as she let him slump to the frost-coated floor.

It took the last of her strength to drop the locking lever into place.

She stood, one hand raised, while she tried to cry, and couldn't. She needed so terribly to cry. The locking lever began to swim in her sight, swelled and grew, and suddenly exploded into darkness.

Miss Caymonger sprawled in a faint on the kitchen linoleum . . .

Something awakened her. She lifted herself stiffly to one elbow, her face feeling numb, and her body aching. Arnold. The cellar. Terror stirred in her again.

She stared at the freeze-box. The lock was still in place. She stumbled to her feet. Never mind her books, her clothes, her belongings. Down the hall. The front door. Quickly, before they came, before they found her.

Here was the knob—how had she missed it? Here was the chain. Quickly, quickly . . .

She paused on the top step as the woman started up. A solid-looking no-nonsense type in a brown coat and an unbelievable feathered hat.

"Goodness!" the woman exclaimed, seeing Miss Caymonger. "What have they done to you?"

"D-done?" Miss Caymonger was shaking uncontrollably. "D-done?"

"Don't tell me they tried it on you too? And you fell for it? That Arnold is a repulsive brat. I had to put him in his place. My dear, it's a racket—getting women alone, making them pay for months in advance, and then scare 'em half to death so they leave. Only they couldn't get away with it with me. I guess I'd still be here if my doctor hadn't ordered an emergency operation. I'm fine now and just came back for some things I left behind."

Miss Caymonger thought of Arnold. She thought of the water pitcher, of the curious *crumping* sound it had made, of the locking lever falling into place with such finality. "You—you're—not—"

"Why, yes," the woman's smile was warm and friendly. "I'm the boarder who was here before you, Regina Wittles."

EDITORS' NOTE: *When we first read this story we were so certain that it was another tale of cannibalism that we almost decided not to finish reading it. We didn't want that to happen to you! As it turned out, we were completely fooled—and we hope you were too!*

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BEST MYSTERIES OF THE MONTH

recommended by ANTHONY BOUCHER

For the first time, one book sweeps awards from both Mystery Writers of America and England's Crime Writers Association: Julian Symons' THE PROGRESS OF A CRIME is (deservedly) MWA's Novel of 1960 and CWA's runnerup. Other MWA awards: best American first, John Holbrook Vance's THE MAN IN THE CAGE; best fact-crime, Miriam Allen deFord's THE OVERBURY AFFAIR. (Runners-up: novel, Geoffrey Household's WATCHER IN THE SHADOWS; "first," Donald E. Westlake's THE MERCENARIES; fact, Sir Sydney Smith's MOSTLY MURDER and Christianna Brand's HEAVEN KNOWS WHO.) CWA's first place went to Lionel Davidson's NIGHT OF WENCESLAS, with Mary Steward's MY BROTHER MICHAEL tying with Symons for second. All of these books have been urged upon you here, mostly with 4 stars.

★★★★★ **LIZZIE BORDEN: THE UNTOLD STORY, *by Edward R. Radin***
(Simon & Schuster, $4.50)

The most tradition-shattering book in the history of fact-crime and the masterwork of Radin's distinguished career presents a brief for the innocence of America's most celebrated "murderess"—and I am compelled (as you will be) to cast an astonished vote of Not Guilty.

★★★★ **THE HEARTLESS LIGHT, *by Gerald Green*** (Scribner's, $4.95)

Slashing angry attack on unprincipled coverage of a kidnaping, and an excellent detection-suspense story as well—as long as a Victorian three-decker but urgently readable.

★★★★ **KILLING TIME, *by Donald E. Westlake*** (Random, $2.95)

One of 1960's top debutants (see above) is even better and even more Hammett-like in his second novel of physical and moral conflict.

★★★★ **THE 39 STEPS, *by John Buchan*** (Popular G531, 35¢)

Revival of 1915 classic deserves more than reprint billing: this is still The Pursuit-Espionage Thriller in all its perfection.

Other well-earned MWA awards: to James Sandoe (N. Y. *Herald Tribune*) as critic to Elizabeth Daly for her contributions to the field; to Charles Addams for his macabre humor; to John Durham and Shirley Jackson for magazine short stories; and to EQ as Grand Master of Mystery.

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The teenage 'tec versus the register rogue

Wally and the Autograph Collector

by PAUL W. FAIRMAN

The Watchful Eye Detective School
Parker Building
New York, New York

Mr. Walter A. Watts
Lettyville, New York
Dear Watts:

I sat down with every intention of writing you a polite business letter in which I would point out a certain error you made and respectfully request that you rectify it. But I find I'm unable to remain that impersonal. All I can say is—*you've done it again.* In spite of all my efforts to confound your devious methods, in spite of repeated warnings to my staff to be on the lookout for your diabolical machinations—*you've done it again.* Of course, in your bland innocence, you've no idea what I'm talking about, so I'll spell it out for you.

Recently, as you are aware, I wrote my first book—*A Guide to Successful Detection, Including Shadowing, Disguises, Cross-Examining, etc., etc., and a Personal Fingerprint Kit*—of which I am justly proud. Due to high publishing costs, a rather steep retail price—$12.00—was necessary. But wanting my former students to reap every benefit, I made them a special offer—$8.24, including postage—the absolute break-even figure.

Your order was mailed with flattering promptness but in filling out your money order, you accidentally (?) transposed the $8.24 into $4.28 and to our eternal shame the book was shipped before your error (?) was discovered.

So I want that book back or the balance due and no more foolishness. It isn't the money—it's the principle of the thing.

Yours impatiently,
John Hayden, President

Dear Johnny:

Am I ever embarrassed, old pal! Making a mistake like that! I guess my mind was on the caper I'm cooking up with a character named Kirby Clark, a visitor here in Lettyville, but that's no excuse. Anyhow

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Johnny, I'm glad it isn't the money that is most important to you—just the principle—because right now, I'm a shade short of cash.

You see, I ordered the book as a birthday present for Winifred Watts, my grandmother. Grandma Winnie was 81 years old the first of the month and I wanted to give her something different. So that sort of puts me in a spot, old pal. You can't ask your grandmother to give back her birthday present just because you goofed and didn't pay for it completely. So I'm enclosing an installment and I'll bang in the balance as soon as my caper with Kirby Clark pays off.

Yours for more patience,
Wally

The Watchful Eye Detective School
Parker Building
New York, New York

Dear Walter:

Yours received and it appears to me that you're getting yourself into a heap of trouble. Kirby Clark is an alias of one of the slickest con men in the business. His real name is Kenneth Carter. He is six feet two inches tall, weighs about one hundred and eighty and has a small crescent-shaped scar on his right cheek. You can accept this description as fact because I make sure to keep posted on such things. So if your Kirby Clark is the same man, *have nothing to do with him!* Leave him to the local police. You are not experienced enough as yet to deal with his kind.

Another thing: I do not consider 43¢ in postage stamps, most of them without gum, as much of an installment on the book you received. Send the balance immediately.

Yours for prompt payment,
John Hayden

Dear Johnny:

I guess it's the same Kirby Clark all right, but maybe he's reformed. Anyhow, what he wants me to do will pay a pretty penny if it comes off and I think it will. Here is the pitch:

You see, Winifred Watts—that's my Grandma Winnie, the one I gave the book to as a birthday present—lives outside Lettyville in a house that's been in our family since the Late Unpleasantness—that's what we call the Revolution up in these parts.

It was originally named Watts Tavern—when my great-great-great grandfather, Wassail Watts, built it in 1768 and made it famous for hot

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buttered rum. Old Wassail Watts, the first and only proprietor, is mentioned in a couple of history books, but we're pretty tight-lipped about him because he was a lusty old lush and not anybody to be very proud of.

Well, old pal, that's the boring background you had to know so that you can understand the caper I'm cooking up with Kirby Clark. He came to town about a week ago and dropped into the store where I'm clerking instead of detecting on account of I'm only nineteen and can't get my private op's license till I'm twenty-one.

I asked what I could do for him and he said he was a collector of Early American documents and had heard there was an old place called Watts Tavern still in existence out here.

I told him, sure, it was still standing but not receiving guests any more because my Grandma Winnie, a fanatical prohibitionist, lived there now.

"I think I'll drop out and see her," he said. "Perhaps I can pick up an authentic document or two for my autograph collection."

I said, fine, go ahead, and directed him, but he came back an hour later without any documents—with nothing but a lump on his head.

"That woman's crazy!" he said. "She hit me with a broom and told me to go tell General Cornwallis he'd get no information out of her."

"I guess I should have mentioned that," I told him. "She's got a thing about strangers. Thinks they're all British spies. Claims she's guarding military secrets up in the attic."

Kirby Clark rubbed his head and asked, "Just what *is* up in the attic?"

"Oh, a lot of old stuff my great-great-great grandfather left there—stuff he ran the tavern with." Which was true. It was stowed up there after old Wassail Watts tried to outdrink two Seneca Indians and never regained consciousness.

"Is the original register still there?" Kirby Clark said.

I asked him what a register was. He said, the old book the guests used to sign their names in, and I said, "Oh, that—sure. I used to play with it when I was a kid."

He smiled. "Do you think you could get it for me?"

"You mean you want me to *steal* it?" I asked aghast.

"It wouldn't be stealing exactly. I'd pay you for it. Then you could buy your grandmother something nice—a new flintlock musket maybe. To mow down the redcoats with."

He thought we were real squares, so I let him know different. I got very suspicious and said, "You must want that old register real bad."

He looked at me for a long time, wondering whether he could trust

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me or not. Then he decided to. He said, "I'll level with you, kid. An ancestor of mine lived near Philadelphia during the Revolution. And some old documents I ran onto indicate he came up here to Watts Tavern in 1776 on a special mission for a friend—a highly secret trip to meet some men who came down from Boston. So I want the registry book for sentimental reasons." He smiled winningly. "You can understand that, can't you? My wanting this ancestor's signature to add to my autograph collection."

"How much is it worth to you?" I asked.

"I'll pay you twenty-five dollars for your trouble."

I said that wasn't enough because I saw I had a sucker on the string and knew I could get more. And it was a good thing I held out because Kirby Clark sure *was* a sucker. He took a deep breath and said, "Kid, to show you my heart's in the right place and to keep your mouth shut, I'll give you five hundred dollars for that register—more money than you ever saw in your life."

He was right about that. *"Five hundred dollars!"* I gasped. "You certainly think a lot of your ancestor."

"I do."

"Then make it six hundred and you've got yourself a deal."

He blinked but he agreed right away, then he turned cagey on me. "Of course I must know my ancestor's name is really in the register."

"What *was* your ancestor's name?"

He took off his hat, held it over his heart, and looked misty-eyed at the ceiling. "Button Gwinnett," he said reverently.

"How come? Your name is Clark."

"The Gwinnetts are on my mother's side."

"Oh, I see. Well, don't worry. Old Button signed this register. Right under the names of the four men from Boston he came to meet." Which was true as Gospel, believe me.

"How can you be so sure?"

"Like I said, I used to play in my grandmother's attic on rainy days when I was a kid and that old-fashioned writing used to fascinate me. I practically memorized those names."

"The whole register?"

"It's only got two pages of names in it. After he opened the tavern, my grandfather drank up the stock in two months. Then he died."

"What were the names of the four men from Boston?"

"J. Pitts, S. Pettigrew, F. Roberts, and T. Merriwether."

His eyes lighted up in admiration of my remarkable memory. He said, "That's good enough for me, kid. I want to get out of town in a hurry—

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I've got a date in New York City. So get right on it. I'll have your dough for you when you slip me the register."

That sounded fine, so—Oops! I'm writing this in the store, Johnny old pal, and the phone's ringing . . . It was Mrs. Murphy on the phone. She wants me to bring her a box of the new muffin mix we just got in. More later.

Wally

The Watchful Eye Detective School
Parker Building
New York, New York

Dear Mr. Watts:

I can't find words to express my profound disappointment in you—in the flaws of character your last letter reveals. Upon receipt of same, I was tempted to phone your grandmother and warn her but I realized it was probably too late.

So far as you are concerned, my amazement is divided into two parts. First, there is your appalling stupidity. You should have known—as a graduate of Watchful Eye, if for no other reason—that when a well-known con man offers hundreds of dollars for something, that something is automatically worth thousands.

In this case, Button Gwinnett is no more an ancestor of Kirby Clark than I am. Button Gwinnett was one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, and there are very few of his signatures in existence. This makes them collector's items of great value. One sold not long ago for $12,000, and the one Kirby Clark conned you out of is probably worth even more. I would not expect you to be cognizant of these facts—living in a hick town forty miles from nowhere as you do—but they would have been available if you'd had sense enough to check at the closest library.

The above is bad enough, but there is more. Your dishonesty tempts me to cancel your Watchful Eye diploma. That a graduate of our glorious institution would rob *his own grandmother* is almost beyond my comprehension!

Only one thing restrains me—the forlorn hope that you didn't actually give Kirby Clark a signature by Button Gwinnett. Perhaps it was only a forgery, or in such poor condition as to be of no value to him. I await your next letter.

Yours in desperate hope,
John Hayden, President

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Dear Johnny:

No, old pal, it *was* a genuine signature of old Button himself. It wasn't a forgery and it wasn't in poor condition. After we made the deal and with Kirby Clark wanting to get out of town as soon as possible, he cut it real fine. He waited for me at the depot and I went out and got the register. But I was a mite slow and didn't get back till the train was just ready to pull out. I gave it to him and he paid me and caught the 4:15 on the fly.

You're right about one thing, though. The signature was of no value to Kirby Clark. That was why I phoned Grandma Winnie to put on the kookie act when the con man went out to see her. And that was why I delivered the register just as the train was pulling out—so that he had to pay for it without reading it.

But everything worked out fine and Grandma Winnie's got six hundred dollars to buy a new oil burner so she won't have to shovel coal this winter.

And by the way, I've been reading her copy of *A Guide to Successful Detection* and it's the greatest. You outdid yourself, Johnny, old pal! I'd sure love to have a copy of my own.

Wistfully yours,
Wally

The Watchful Eye Detective School
Parker Building
New York, New York

Dear Wally:

So you conned a con artist. For that, I can pardon you. But I'm a little confused. You said the signature was genuine, that it was neither a forgery nor in bad condition. But still, you say that it had no value. I'm unable to reconcile these statements and I'd like the answer.

However, I know from experience that I won't get it unless I pay through the nose. So to save further wear and tear on the mailman, I'm sending you immediately a copy of the book, postpaid. I expect my answer by return mail.

Yours in defeat as usual,
Johnny

Dear Johnny:

Thanks a million for the big surprise! A copy of your book—and free! But as it so happened, Grandma Winnie got tired of reading about detection and returned *her* copy to me as a gift, too. So, wanting to

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meet my obligation to you, old pal, I sold the one you sent me to Jerry Jensen, a good joe, for $10.80—ten per cent discount off the price on the cover. And I'm enclosing a money order for $3.53, the amount I still owe you on the first copy. Needless to say, the small profit I made will come in handy.

Oh, about why the Button Gwinnett signature was of no value: You see, Kirby Clark was right about old Button's trip to Watts Tavern being secret. It's been known here in Lettyville for generations that he brought the four Boston characters a message from old Ben Franklin and took back a very important answer.

But the British were all over the town and they'd have nabbed a big wheel like Button. So he used an alias—something Kirby Clark should dig real easy. Old Button signed the register, *John Smith*—but it's authentic because my grandfather, just out of curiosity, had it checked by an expert against the signature on the Declaration of Independence, and it was the expert's opinion that old Button wrote it.

But that wasn't enough proof for the historians, so six hundred dollars was a good price for the register—about five hundred and ninety-nine dollars more than it was worth. And Grandma Winnie will remember Kirby Clark gratefully every time she doesn't have to shovel coal this winter.

Be sure and let me know when you write your next book, Johnny old pal. I want to be the first cash customer on your list.

All the best,
Walter A. Watts
(the A is for Alert)

COMING ATTRACTIONS . . .

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR:	**DON KNOWLTON**
TITLE:	***The Room at the End of the Hall***
TYPE:	Crime Story
LOCALE:	Carlton, United States
TIME:	The Present
COMMENTS:	*What Gerald Cartright saw the night of his class reunion, he saw with his own eyes, as plain as day. First they all thought he was drunk . . .*

I DON'T GIVE A DAMN WHAT SHE says," said Gerald Cartright to himself. "I'm going."

"She" was his mother-in-law. He had learned to address her as "Mother," but privately he called her the Old Duck. She quacked all the time, and she waddled.

Oh, she was a most estimable person. She knew how to run things. If she hadn't come and taken charge, when Sue was going to have the baby, he didn't know what they would have done. Now he wished to God she'd go home.

Sue was wonderful. She'd just smiled up at him, with the baby cuddled on her shoulder, and said, "Have a good time, dear." Sweet Sue! But her mother—

The Old Duck had backed him where Sue couldn't hear.

"How can you be so inconsiderate?"

"Look," he said, "the baby's ten days old, everything's all right, I haven't been out of the house a single night for over seven weeks—"

"So now," she quacked, "you want to go out on a drunken brawl."

"It's not a drunken brawl! It's a college reunion."

"Same thing."

"Now, Mother, listen. Once a year the alumni in this part of the State have this get-together. It's at the hotel. Naturally it's a stag party—a college for men only has no female alumnae. Wives aren't invited. And Sue couldn't go anyhow."

"So you're taking advantage of her situation to go out on the

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town," accused the Old Duck. "I know how these things end up. You'll come staggering in about four A.M.—"

"Aw, nuts!"

And he banged the door as he went out.

Gerald took a bus downtown—the Old Duck might want the car. Carlton was, after all, just an overgrown village. But the Echo Room, in the Hotel Antlers, was famous.

He was a bit late. A mob was milling around the bar. He elbowed his way through, hunting for Cliff Arndt, a Carlton boy who had been his room-mate. Cliff had a job in New York, but Gerald had hoped he would show up. He didn't—he wasn't there.

But some of the men from the office were there—and they ganged up on him.

"Here's the new father! What, no cigars? Then he'll have to buy a drink!"

Gerald did; and then they did, and then somebody else did. Martinis. Men he didn't know slapped him on the back and asked him how much the baby weighed. "A boy? That's fine." What a wonderful thing to be an alumnus! What marvelous men, these graduates! Finest fellows in the world. Well, all right, one more martini—just one . . .

When they sat down to dinner, Gerald was a bit puzzled as to how to unfold his napkin. Somebody across the table told a story that was very, very funny. Gerald laughed so hard that he knocked over his water glass. The food didn't seem to have much taste, but he ate everything that came along, winding up with a large slab of pecan pie.

And then Judge Perkins began to speak.

He spoke and he spoke and he spoke—and Gerald Cartright became aware that all was not well.

It wasn't the smoke and the warm stuffiness and the insufferable tediousness of the old Judge's remarks. The lighting fixture—the big one that hung high in the center of the room—was behaving in a most erratic fashion. It was revolving slowly, and meanwhile traveling majestically in an orbit. In fact, the whole room—

Gerald rose unsteadily. Cool air had become imperative. He was aware of certain inner warning signals. He sneaked out of the hotel and started to walk to the cab stand on the corner. But instead of staying on the sidewalk, his feet took control and steered him out into the street.

"Oh, oh," said Gerald, "am I?"

Back on the sidewalk he tried to stand still, and watched the bank across the street go round him. And he thought of the Old Duck.

Well, there was only one thing to do. Walk it off. Walk home. It was only about two miles.

So he started. It was a balmy June night—no moon, but twinkling

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stars. More stars than there should have been, and two Big Dippers.

But Gerald was not in a mood to speculate on astronomical abnormalities. With every block he became more and more aware of the incompatibility of dry martinis and pecan pie. His feet now went where he willed them to go, and the world was no longer a merry-go-round—but he felt suspiciously like Vesuvius just before an eruption.

At last he could put it off no longer. He was passing a big house, with ample grounds—the home of Simon Leavitt, retired and honorary chairman of the Carlton National Bank. Several walks led toward the house, through the shrubbery—walks interspersed with stretches of velvet lawn. Gerald's immediate impulse was to get off the street, to find a place where he would not be seen. He scuttled up one of the walks, got a fair distance from the street, turned aside onto a grassy spot—and was very, very sick.

He awoke with a start and found himself lying on the grass. What, where, how? Then it all came back. In a panic he looked at the luminous dial of his watch. Eleven thirty!

Would the Old Duck be waiting up? He leaped to his feet—leaped and then froze. For ahead of him—where he could see, although at a distance, every detail—was being enacted a drama of violence that held him motionless.

He was looking down a strip of lawn, bounded on both sides by shrubbery, toward a corner of the house. On that corner was a window. Branches of overhanging trees cut off the view above, and branches of crowding bushes cut off visibility on both sides. It was as if he were in a tunnel that focused on that corner window.

The room behind the window was dark. In fact, the whole house was dark—except for a brilliantly lighted room at the far end of the house, which Gerald could clearly see through that window. There must be a hall, he thought, that runs the whole length of the house, and I am looking down that hall and into a room at the end of it.

A woman stood in the center of the room. She was beautiful. Her dark hair cascaded over her shoulders. She was trembling. Her hands were clasped. She seemed to be begging, pleading—

Into view came a man. He was tall and sinister, with beetling eyebrows. He appeared to be taunting the woman. His smile was insolent, sardonic.

The woman seized his coat lapels. She fairly threw herself on him, in a frenzy of supplication.

Whereupon the man whirled her around, pulled a knife from his pocket, and plunged it into her back, just behind her heart—plunged it up to the hilt.

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She sank to the floor, the knife protruding from between her shoulder blades. The man, poised on the balls of his feet, glanced about, turned, took one step—

And the lights went out.

Gerald's first impulse was to run to the house and pound on the door.

But that would accomplish nothing. The woman was undoubtedly dead. The murderer—

The police! Of course, the police!

Gerald hurried to the street. Perhaps he could get a ride with a passing motorist. He started, half running, toward downtown. Along came a cruising cab, and he hailed it. He reached the police station in a matter of minutes.

There was an officer in uniform sitting behind a counter. Gerald rushed up to him.

"I've just seen a murder committed!" he cried. "A man stabbed a woman to death! In Simon Leavitt's house! Get out there right away!"

The officer regarded him with a cold eye.

"Calm down, sonny," he said. "Take it easy. Now—how was that again?"

Gerald pulled himself together and tried to speak in a normal tone.

"I saw a man kill a woman. With a knife. About ten minutes ago."

"Is that so!" said the officer disagreeably. "In Simon Leavitt's house, you say?"

"Yes! Why don't you get going? The murderer will get away—"

"I said, take it easy! Now—who was murdered?"

"I don't know who she was. I don't know who the man was either. I was just looking in the window—"

"You were *what*?"

"I was looking in the window, and there they were, and he—"

"Wait a minute. *What* window?"

"A window at the side of the house."

"You weren't inside the house?"

"Oh, no, I was out in the yard."

"You were, were you? And what were you doing out in the yard, this time of night? Did Leavitt know you were there?"

"Of course not. I—"

"Peeping Tom, eh?"

"No! I was being sick. And then I passed out. This happened just when I woke up."

The officer got up and came around to where Gerald stood.

"Let me smell your breath."

He sniffed professionally.

"Uh, huh," he observed. "I thought so. Go look at yourself in the glass."

Gerald did. His suit was wrinkled. He had grass stains on his shirt. There were streaks of dirt on his cheek. His tie was loose and dangled below his right ear.

"Now, my boy," resumed the officer, "let's have the whole story, starting with the first drink."

Painstakingly Gerald reviewed

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the evening, detail by detail. When he had finished, the officer pressed a button. In came another policeman.

"Stebbins," said officer Number One, "we have a report of trouble of some sort at Simon Leavitt's place. Go out there and take a look around. I suppose you'll have to wake up the old man. Tell him that a passer-by thought he saw a prowler trying to get into the house. You'd better go through every room. The old lady is an invalid—she never gets off the second floor—but take a peek in her room too, if you can. Keep your eyes open for anything that looks out of the way. Find out how many people are in the house now, or have been there tonight."

Stebbins departed.

"You don't believe me," Gerald said incredulously.

"Martinis," said the officer. "They do strange things to you. I don't touch them any more."

The stroke of a bell boomed out—midnight.

"Say, I've got to get home," exclaimed Gerald. And he started for the door.

"Oh, no, you don't!" said the officer. "You stay right here and sober up."

"But I'm not drunk! That is I was, I guess, but I'm not now, and I wasn't when—"

"Says you! Anyhow, let's wait and hear what Stebbins has to say."

And the officer proceeded nonchalantly to read a newspaper. Gerald sat on a hard-backed chair, picturing the Old Duck watching the living-room clock, loaded with well-chosen words.

At a quarter to one Stebbins returned.

"Well?" asked the first officer.

"Everything's okay," reported Stebbins. "The only people in the house tonight were the old man and his wife. They have day help, but all of them left by eight o'clock. There was no sign of any prowler, no sign of any disturbance anywhere in the house. Like you said, I looked in every room. The old man wasn't as mad as I thought he might be—he kind of liked the idea that we were on the job."

Officer Number One shrugged.

"You see?" he said to Gerald.

"But I saw it!" Gerald shouted. "I saw it right in front of me, as plain as day!"

"All right," said the desk officer, "let's go into a few more details. You say you were looking into a room. What sort of a room was it? Describe it."

"Why," said Gerald, "I—I didn't notice much—my attention wasn't on the room, it was on what was happening. Wait a minute! There was one thing I remember. A great big chandelier was hanging from the ceiling, right in the middle of the room. They were standing directly underneath it."

"Stebbins," asked Officer Number One, "you said you examined every

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room in the Leavitt house. Is there a room with a big chandelier?"

"No, sir," said Stebbins.

Officer Number One turned to Gerald with a not unkindly smile.

"Don't worry about it," he said. "Just forget it. But if I were you, I'd be careful about martinis. Perhaps you ought not to drink at all."

"But I tell you," insisted Gerald, "I was *not* drunk when I saw—"

"Hold it!" interrupted the officer. "Now think it over. If it wasn't the gin, what was it? If you were sober, what you had must have been a hallucination. And if it was a hallucination, it means you're off your rocker. If I were you, I'd settle for being drunk instead of being crazy."

He straightened Gerald's tie, brushed off his coat, and patted him on the back.

"Get a good night's sleep," he said. "Yeah, sleep it off. Stebbins, take this lad home."

Thus it was that Gerald, at one ten A.M., was driven to his home in a police car. Every block brought him closer to the Old Duck. He would rather have stayed in jail.

There was a light on in the house—but the house was silent. Cautiously he let himself in with his key.

There in a rocker, at the foot of the stairs, sat the Old Duck—fast asleep!

Never did a cat-burglar tread more softly than Gerald as he stole upstairs and got into bed.

He slept through two baby feedings. It was almost eleven o'clock when he came downstairs.

"Well!" said Sue.

"Coffee," said Gerald.

"I wanted to wake you up," Sue went on, "but Mother wouldn't let me. Gerald, what time *did* you get in last night?"

"Now, Sue," broke in the Old Duck, "don't badger the boy. It was a college reunion! Get him some coffee."

Gerald looked at her in surprise. Her expression was inscrutable. Was that a twinkle in her eye? Had she really been asleep when he got in?

"Pack him off to work," she went on. "He's late."

There was time for nothing more. He drank his coffee standing up, and ran for the bus.

"Ellison wants to see you," the information girl told him as soon as he reached the office. Ellison was his boss. Gerald hurried into Ellison's big room at the end of the corridor.

"Shut the door," said Ellison, and Gerald did.

"Now! Out with it! Just what in hell have you been up to?"

"Sorry I'm late," Gerald began "but you see—"

"It's not that, you idiot. Anybody could be late after a college reunion. The police have been in to see me."

"The police!"

"Yes, the police."

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"About *me*?"

"Yes, about *you*."

Gerald felt a queer sinking in his knees.

"But why—"

"Do you blame them?" asked Ellison drily. "Wouldn't you say that your behavior last night was, to put it charitably, a bit peculiar?"

Suddenly it all came flooding back—just as if he were living it over again. When he had awakened it had seemed merely a nightmare. But it wasn't. It was real. It had happened.

"I've had the police version of this strange affair," Ellison continued. "Now I want yours. Don't leave out a single detail."

Again, as he had in the police station the night before, Gerald recited every particular, starting with his arrival at the Hotel Antlers. Ellison questioned him closely on some points. How many martinis? Gerald could not remember exactly. How long had he slept on the Leavitt lawn? Gerald didn't know.

"Do you still believe," asked Ellison, "that you actually saw what you say you saw?"

Gerald twisted his hands.

"I don't know what to believe," he said. "They say I *couldn't* have seen any such thing, but I can't get over the feeling that I really did."

For some moments Ellison was silent.

"This is really rather serious," he said finally. "If it was just something you imagined when you were crocked, that's one thing; but if it *was* an illusion, if you saw things that weren't there, it would indicate a mental condition that needs watching. I think you can understand why the police came to me about it. They thought I ought to know."

Gerald could think of nothing to say.

"Let's dismiss the whole business for the time being," concluded Ellison. "But Gerald, I wouldn't drink anything, if I were you. You'd better go on the wagon."

Gerald could do no work that afternoon.

The mounting implications of what Ellison had said chased round and round. Was it intoxication or hallucination? Drunk or crazy? If it was alcohol, he would *have* to go on the wagon. If it wasn't alcohol, then—well, then, *what?* And still there persisted the unreasonable, the unsupportable conviction that he had seen a murder committed before his eyes. His head ached. He left the office early.

He walked into the house to find two women who had been waiting anxiously for him. Sue's eyes were red.

"Oh, Gerald!" she wailed.

"The police have been here," said the Old Duck. "They wanted to know how you've been acting lately."

"Oh, my God," said Gerald.

Sue began to weep.

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"Hush up," commanded the Old Duck. "Let's get to the bottom of this. Now, Gerald, what happened?"

For the third time Gerald reported, in careful sequence, exactly what had occurred the night before —omitting nothing, mentioning even the pecan pie. And then he told them about Ellison.

"Sue," said his mother-in-law, when he had finished, "there's only one thing to do—and that is to treat the whole incident as if it never took place at all. Gerald didn't do anything bad; all he did was drink too many martinis, and your father has been known to do that too. Gerald has had a peculiar and unfortunate experience—just why or how, we don't know. The important thing is not to magnify it out of all proportion. It's past, it's done, and the sooner it's forgotten the better. Let's all agree to say nothing more about it and carry on as usual."

Old Duck? Old brick, thought Gerald suddenly. He threw her a grateful glance.

"But just the same, Gerald," she added, "I think Ellison is right about your drinking. I'd quit—just to be sure."

There, thought Gerald, the matter stood.

But it didn't.

The pattern of that incredible evening kept repeating itself in his memory, leaving always, in its wake, an unanswered question. He tossed in his sleep. At the office he would drift into weird reveries, even speculating on the nature of the human mind.

Sue was wonderful. There was never a word of reproach. Everything was as it had been before. But then they were invited to a cocktail party. "No, thanks," he had said, "I've taken the pledge for a while." Had it been necessary for Sue to add, in her high clear voice, that "Gerald hasn't been too well lately?"

Word got around. Gerald overheard it in a whisper the night the bridge club met. "They say he doesn't dare take a single drink or he goes completely off his rocker."

There was a dance at the Country Club. The Gerald Cartrights were not invited. "Since he's on the wagon, and besides—well, you know."

A promotion was coming up in the office. Gerald had had high hopes.

"I've got to be frank about this," Ellison explained. "You were slated for the job, but under the circumstances—"

More and more the Cartrights were left to themselves. Their friends just seemed to fade out. The one bright spot was the baby. He grew and grew, and Sue was finally able to "cope," so the Old Duck packed up and went home.

"Heads up, Gerald!" were her last words.

Gerald was amazed to find that

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he was sorry to see her go. Quite a gal, that old gal, he said to himself —though he hoped Sue would never get that broad in the beam.

What he was not prepared for was a letter, marked *Personal*, that he got from the Old Duck, at the office, a week later. It read:

Dear Gerald:

It is not easy for me to write this letter. But it is necessary that we face facts.

First of all, I hope you realize that my husband and I love you just as if you were our own son. So it is for your sake, as well as Sue's, that we urge you to do what we suggest.

I have learned from Sue (of course she has never told you that she knew, or that she wrote me about it) that your chances of success in business and your social standing are being utterly ruined by reports arising out of your unfortunate experience following the college reunion. This situation must be corrected.

Anyone who is even partially familiar with the facts will realize that alcohol was not the cause, and therefore abstinence is not the cure. I myself am convinced of this because, after the martinis, there followed (1) a big dinner (2) a long walk (3) disgorgement (4) sleep. Therefore you were not drunk when you "saw" the murder. Therefore it must have been an hallucination. The inevitable conclusion is mental instability.

The remedy is, to take, openly and aboveboard, steps to cure your condition. If tackled in its initial stages it can be arrested.

We have in our city a sanitarium which specializes in cases such as yours. A treatment of from three to four months is indicated. That would of course mean leave of absence from your job, or possibly giving up the job entirely. We realize that you do not have financial resources sufficient to maintain a household during such a period, much less pay sanitarium fees. My husband and I are therefore prepared to assume this expense. We are not wealthy, Gerald. It will mean altering certain plans we had made. But it is so much more important than anything else in our lives that we feel your return to mental health must come first.

I am writing this to you instead of Sue because the decision must be yours. Think carefully, Gerald, and let me know.

He read the letter three times.

"The dear damned lovable old fool," he said aloud, with tears in his eyes.

But—*was* she a fool? What if she was right?

"I've got to talk this over with somebody!" he kept repeating to himself. "If I don't I'll go crazy if I'm not already."

But with whom? Sue? How can a man say to his wife, "Please, darling, give me your considered and impartial opinion. Am I nuts?"

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Then he thought of Cliff Arndt, the Carlton boy whom he had hoped to see at the reunion. He called New York and got Cliff on the phone.

"Cliff," he said, "I'm in real trouble, serious trouble. I *must* see you."

There was urgency in his voice. Cliff agreed to break a date and come up to Carlton that very night.

"I'll get there on the eight forty-five," Cliff said. "Meet me at the station. I'll have to go back to New York on the midnight special, but that will give us three hours."

Gerald was waiting as the train pulled in. The very sight of Cliff Arndt somehow reassured him—dispelled the feeling, which had been growing in him, of sliding into a pit.

"Let's go round to the Dutchman's," suggested Cliff. Gerald nodded. It was a quiet little bar, a good place to talk.

They had barely sat down at a table in the back when Gerald popped off like a suddenly uncapped bottle of warm soda.

"Cliff, I'm in a perfectly horrible mess! They think maybe I'm insane, and my boss won't trust me with anything important, and nobody invites us anywhere on account of if I take a drink I am supposed to go loony, and my mother-in-law wants to put me in a sanitarium—"

"Whoa!" said Cliff. "Hold everything! Simmer down, cool off, take your time. You're coiled up tight as a steel spring. Let's have a couple of drinks. How's Sue, and the kid?"

"But they say I mustn't drink—"

"To heck with them!" said Cliff. "Do what I tell you! We're going to have *three* scotches, one-two-three, just like we used to, and talk about nothing in particular while we do it. Waiter!"

And Cliff talked—about New York, about the brokerage business, about football, about classmates. Toward the end of the third scotch he said quietly, "All right, Gerald, let's have it."

And so, for the fourth time, Gerald reviewed every detail of that fateful reunion night. Gerald told him about Ellison, and about the behavior of their friends, and showed him the letter from the Old Duck.

Cliff came back to the details of "witnessing" the murder.

"You don't remember, do you," he asked Gerald, "that my folks and the Leavitts are close friends? We've visited them time and again. I know the grounds around that house, and I know the layout of the inside of the house. You couldn't possibly—"

He broke off. There was a strange look in his eyes.

"Gerald," he said, "if we went out there, do you think you could show me the exact spot where you were standing when you saw the murder?"

"I think I could," Gerald an-

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swered slowly. "I remember where I turned in from the sidewalk, and I recall that when I woke up there was an overhanging spruce branch right over my head. I'm pretty sure I could find it."

"Let's try," said Cliff.

"Now?"

"Why not?"

They went out in a cab.

Gerald led the way up one of the walks leading into the grounds, and turned aside onto a grassy spot. He came to a drooping spruce branch, and stopped.

"I think this is it," he said.

"The room in the house nearest to where we are is the library," Cliff observed.

They turned toward the house —and Gerald's fingers suddenly closed on Cliff's arm.

They were looking down a strip of lawn, bounded on both sides by shrubbery, toward a corner of the house. On that corner was a window. Spreading branches of trees cut off the view above and crowding bushes cut off visibility on both sides. It was if they were in a tunnel that focused on that corner window.

The room behind the window was dark. In fact, the whole house was dark—except for a brilliantly lighted room at the far end of the house—a room into which they could clearly see through that window. It was as if they were looking down a hall that ran the whole length of the house and into a room at the end of the hall.

And then Gerald thought he was really going mad . . .

CHALLENGE TO THE READER: *What do you think? Is Gerald Cartright suffering from hallucinations? Or did he actually see a murder committed in the Leavitt house the night of his class reunion? For the final paragraphs of this story please turn to page 130.*

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TRANSLATOR'S NOTE: *Early in the twelfth century Petrus Alphonsi, a Spanish Jew, was converted to Christianity. He was familiar with many tales from the East which laid strong hold on the fancy of the medieval world. He was influenced by zeal for his new religion in combining many of the tales into a work for the use of the clergy. In his* DISCIPLINA CLERICALIS *he wove them together. The sixteenth chapter (which follows) has a simplicity and vividness which make it a smooth anticipation of the modern detective short story.*

MR AID-FOR-THE-NEEDY

by PETRUS ALPHONSI

(Translated by William C. McDermott)

IT HAPPENED THAT A CERTAIN MAN had a son to whom, after his death, he left nothing except his house. The son, with great labor, barely supplied to his body those things which nature demands, but nonetheless, though hard pressed by hunger, he did not wish to sell his house. However, the son had a very rich neighbor who wanted to buy the boy's house to make his own more spacious. But despite entreaty and offer, the boy was unwilling to sell.

After the rich man was convinced of this, he considered by what traps and artifices he might take the house away from the boy. But the youth avoided all contact with the man. Finally the rich man said to the boy:

"Rent me a part of your courtyard, since I wish to store ten casks of oil in it underground. They will not inconvenience you at all, and from the rent you will get some support for your life."

Forced by necessity, the boy agreed and gave the rich man the keys to the house.

But after he received the keys, the rich man dug up the youth's courtyard and buried therein five casks full of oil and five half full. When this was done, he called the boy, and returning the keys of the house, said: "I entrust my ten casks of oil to you."

After a long time it happened in that land that oil became scarce. Seeing this, the rich man said to the boy: "Come and help me dig up the oil which I handed over to your care, and you will receive a reward for your labor and your guardianship."

When he heard of the reward, the youth agreed to help the rich man

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to the best of his ability. But the rich man, not forgetful of his own vile fraud, brought men there to buy the oil. When the casks were examined, he called the boy and said: "Friend, because of your carelessness I have lost some of my oil. Moreover, you have fraudulently taken away that which I entrusted to you. Wherefore I want you to restore my property to me." At these words the rich man led the boy into the presence of a judge.

The judge, on hearing the story, promptly indicted the youth. Not knowing what to reply, the boy sought a postponement of one day, and because the judge was just, it was granted.

Now there lived in that city a certain wise old man who was called Mr. Aid-for-the-Needy. The youth had heard reports of the old sage's excellence. So he went to him and asked counsel of him, saying: "If those stories about you which have been told me by many tellers are true, bring aid to me after your own manner. For I am unjustly accused."

When the wise man heard the sincerity of the defendant, he was moved by pity, and said: "With the aid of God I will bring aid to you. But, as you have received a postponement until tomorrow from the judge, do not fail to go to court, and I will be there prepared to give aid to your verity and to damage their falsity."

The youth did what the wise old man ordered. When it was morning, the wise man came to the judge. After the judge saw that he was a learned and wise man, he made him sit beside him. Then the judge summoned the plaintiff and the defendant and ordered them to repeat their testimony. And they did so. Then, while they were so standing in his presence, the judge turned to the wise man and asked him thereupon to pass judgment.

The wise man said: "Order now, Judge, that clear oil from the five full casks be measured and you would know then how much clear oil is therein. And in like manner from the five half casks, and you would know how much clear oil is therein. Then let the oily sediment from the five full casks be measured and you would know how much oily sediment is therein. And in like manner you should make a measurement from the five half casks, and you would know how much oily sediment is therein. And if you shall have found as much oily sediment in the half casks as in the full casks, you would know that oil has been stolen. But if in the half casks you shall have found only such a proportion of sediment as the clear oil therein deposited, you would know that oil has not been stolen."

On hearing this, the judge confirmed the decision, and so it was done. And in this manner the youth was set free because of the insight of Mr. Aid-for-the-Needy.

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **HENRY SLESAR**

TITLE: ***The Dirty Detail***

TYPE: Crime Story à la **Black Mask**

LOCALE: New York City

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *For nearly ten years a profound hate festered inside ex-G.I. Pearson. Then one day he found the man he hated so deeply . . . and planned his revenge.*

PEARSON PICKED OUT THE PORCINE eyes of Guedo in the barroom mirror. It was a jolt to see them there, surrounded by gray civilian reflections, and Pearson didn't accept the recognition at first. He elbowed his way through the steamy room until he saw the solid substance of the man himself.

It was Guedo, all right—Sergeant John Guedo, 25th Infantry Division. Hunched over and thinking. Brooding into a beer glass.

Pearson felt a little dizzy. He wanted to step forward, tap the chevron-bare sleeve, and say, *Hello, Sergeant*—just like that, grinning. Then he would wait a handful of seconds, only long enough to see the fear and bafflement in Guedo's piggish eyes, and then—

His fist was clenched so tight it hurt. But he wouldn't make his move now—the time and place were wrong. After all these years he'd finally spotted Guedo, and now he would take his own sweet time.

The bartender was mopping up around Guedo's elbow. Pearson saw his man straighten up and drop a spinning coin on the bar. Then Guedo shoved his pointed jaw into the upturned collar of his coat and headed for the door.

Pearson followed him. He kept twenty paces behind, hating his back. At 46th Street the Sergeant bought a *Journal* at the newsstand, then joined a mournful group waiting for a bus. Pearson didn't know what to do. He lived uptown, on the east side; the bus would cost him half an hour, and Ruth was expecting him early.

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But when the bus pulled up, Pearson climbed on board after him. He took a seat in the back, so he could stare at Guedo's neck, and think himself back to '51 and '52, back to Fort Monmouth and Korea, and to the helpless rage that Guedo's cruelty had festered in Pearson's mind. That hate was now like a tonic: Pearson never felt so healthy in his life.

Guedo rose at the Ninth Avenue stop and went to the doors. Pearson reached them just before they folded shut, and followed Guedo home.

Home was an apartment house with a noble arched entrance and a hallway that stank. Pearson waited until Guedo was out of sight, then Pearson went into the hallway. He peered at the directory and saw the faded letters adjacent to the apartment number: Guedo, 4-B.

He took a taxi uptown. It was a luxury, but that was how he felt. When he walked into his apartment, Ruth kissed him once and looked at him twice. The pale round face she had been expecting was narrower than usual, and pinker, and it made her ask questions.

"Nothing much," Pearson said. "Met an old friend from the Army, that's all."

That night he fell asleep quickly and had dreams. He saw himself in uniform, with Guedo at his back. He was on the detail squad again, the dirty detail squad—sixteen hours in the bivouac kitchen, then as a fireman trying to start a fire under thirty garbage pails of boiling water for the company coffee, then sweating in the target pits while the bullets twanged around his ears, then cleaning a thousand rifles for the next day's shooting . . . He saw the Sergeant clearly, grinning with his yellow teeth at Pearson's crawling discomfort, but he woke up without calling it a nightmare. Not any more, Pearson thought. Not any more.

His breakfast appetite was large. He munched a third slice of toast and said, "Say, was it tonight that you were going to your mother's, or Wednesday?"

"I thought we decided I wasn't going," Ruth said.

He gulped coffee. "You go ahead if you want to. You don't see your mother that often."

She thought it over, then kissed him on the cheek. "Okay," she said. "If you're sure you don't mind."

Later in the office, he stared at the telephone a long time before getting up the nerve to dial the number he found in the directory, wondering why he had never tried this simple method of locating the man he hated. Who would have thought that Guedo was practically in his back yard?

He dialed the number. The phone rang six times without an answer.

So Guedo had a job. Pearson smiled tightly, and hoped that it was a dirty, greasy, nasty job.

He came home to an empty

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apartment, but Ruth had left it spotless. His freshly ironed shirts were on the bureau, the refrigerator was well-stocked, and there was a long note from his wife telling him what to eat and what to wear and admonishing him not to make *too* much of a mess before her return. He crumpled the note and headed for the telephone in the bedroom. This time he got an answer.

"Yeah, this is John Guedo. Who's this?"

"Maybe you won't remember me, Sergeant. It was back in 1951. Monmouth. Private Pearson."

"Who?"

"Private Fred Pearson, 25th Infantry." He gritted his teeth. "You used to call me Baby Face, remember?"

There was a pause, and Pearson realized that Guedo didn't remember, that all the memory was his own, that he was nothing in Guedo's mind now but an anonymous blure. The realization was worse than any torture Geudo had ever inflicted; the Sargent didn't even remember!

"Oh, yeah," Guedo said, lying casually. "I guess so. What about it?"

Pearson forced himself to grin. "Maybe I shouldn't remind you, Sargent. Maybe I could save myself a hundred bucks."

"What's that about a hundred bucks?"

"You loaned me a hundred when we got back to the States, after Inchon. I meant to send you back the dough, but I didn't know where you were. Remember now, Sergeant?"

"Oh, sure," Guedo said quickly. "How are you, Pearson?"

"I'm fine," he said, trembling. "I'm fine, Sergeant. Only I don't like being in debt. You know how it is."

"Sure, pal, sure. Look, whyncha mail me the dough? I live on Ninth Avenue, you got a pencil?"

"No, I want to do this right, Sergeant. You think you can come up to my place tonight? We could talk over old times, have a couple of drinks, and I could hand you the money."

"Well, I'm kind of busy—"

"I'd really like to pay you in person, Sergeant. I don't live far away —you could make it in half an hour."

"Okay," Guedo said finally. "If you want it that way, pal. What was the name again?"

Pearson spelled it out, and told him the address. Then he hung up.

He was hungry. He ate the cold chicken and salad that Ruth had prepared for him, leaving the dirty plates and silver on the table. Then he began his hunt for the M-1 that he had smuggled out of the Army in disassembled pieces. He hadn't thought of the weapon since that first year back from the service; vague notions of hunting trips had never materialized, and the rifle had remained unused. Now he had

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a use for it, and the anticipation made his search a frantic one.

At last he remembered that Ruth had done a major overhaul of the spare closet in the foyer. It was crammed with plastic garment bags and smelled of mothballs. He left an unholy mess behind him, a mess that would have sent Ruth into hysterics of anger, but he found the M-1. He patted its butt affectionately, sighted down its barrel, and recalled how lousy he had been on the firing range. But it wouldn't matter, not tonight.

Pearson scrounged around the debris on the floor and found the clip. There were eight bullets, still deadly in their shiny golden jackets. He loaded the M-1, put it tenderly on the bed, and returned to the living room.

An hour later the doorbell rang. He took his time answering it.

Guedo was a narrow slanting figure in the doorway, the collar of his tight-buttoned topcoat up around his ears, the grease-spotted hat pulled over his eyebrows. He looked thin, whiter than Pearson remembered. "Hi," Guedo said. He was trying to be pleasant. He was smiling for his hundred bucks. "Hi, buddy," he said. "Nice to see you."

Pearson let him in. He took the coat and hat, and Guedo looked around the warm, now disordered room with what Pearson thought was envy. He gave Guedo the leather chair and offered him a drink. Guedo smiled as he nodded.

"You *sure* you remember me?" Pearson said, mixing the highballs. "It's been a long time, Sergeant."

"Say, you think I forget a guy what owes me a hundred bucks?" Guedo laughed, and Pearson laughed too.

"No, I guess not." He handed Guedo the drink and sat down opposite. "Here's to the 25th," he said, raising his glass. "Here's to all those dirty details you gave me Sarge."

Guedo looked at him for the first time—really looked. Something changed in his face, a shifting of lines between his nose and his mouth and pointed chin. Pearson knew what it was. Recognition.

"Yeah," the Sergeant breathed. "Yeah . . ."

"You remember now? I was real hurt when you didn't remember, Sergeant."

Guedo's blue jaw went slack. His lips moved as if he were muttering a roll call. Then the bafflement left his face, his eyes enlarged, and he grinned.

"Pearson," he chuckled. "Private Baby Face Pearson. So you're the one. I forgot your name."

"But not the money, Sergeant."

"Yeah, the money . . ."

"The hundred bucks. You remembered that, didn't you? And that's the funniest part, Sarge, since three wasn't any hundred bucks."

"What?"

"There wasn't any loan. You wouldn't give me the right time.

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It's not a hundred bucks I owe you. It's something else."

Guedo's eyes glittered. "What's the big idea?"

"I wanted a real good look at you, Sargeant. A close look. You're not so much now, are you? What do you do for a living? I hope it's real dirty work, like you used to hand me."

"You got me up here for nothing?"

"I didn't say it was for nothing, Sergeant."

"You punk! You're still a whining little punk, ain't you?" He stood up.

"Take it easy, Sarge. Let's be sociable."

"I got better things to do than to waste my time on punks."

Pearson shrugged. "If that's how you feel, okay, I'll get your coat." He went into the bedroom and came out with the M-1 nicely balanced in his hands.

"What are you doing with that gun?"

"Sit down, Sergeant. We didn't even get started."

"Hey, you nuts or something? Is that thing loaded?"

"You bet it's loaded. Remember how you used to bawl me out to keep it loaded? You were a real good teacher, Sarge." Pearson smiled as he waved the muzzle. "Sit down I said."

Guedo sat, slowly, licking his lips. "I think you must be one of them psychos."

"I just want to talk, Sergeant. Old times, you know? You remember those old times. All those nice filthy details?"

"Look, buddy—"

"Sixteen hours KP, that was your specialty, right? Or that greasing bit. Or that garbage detail you liked to stick me with. You remember all that, Sarge?"

"So what?" Guedo said. "It didn't kill you, did it? You lived through it."

"But maybe you won't." He cocked the rifle. "Start talking, Sergeant. Give me some good reason why I shouldn't put a bullet in your head. Just one good reason . . ."

"You're crazy! You're out of your head!"

Pearson stepped closer. "Start talking, Sergeant. Or start praying. Either one."

"Listen to me!" Guedo put his hands up, palms outward. "You're sick, pal. That's eight, nine years ago. Things are different—"

"No different," Pearson grated. "I still hate you just as much. So let's hear you beg, Sarge. Beg for your life . . ."

Guedo gasped, then lowered his hands. His eyes flickered, and Pearson, ecstatic in the moment, thought Guedo was going to faint. But then Guedo's features stiffened and his voice dropped.

"You punk," he whispered. "You dirty punk."

"I warn you, Guedo!"

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"I'm not begging for nothing. You want to shoot me, go ahead and shoot. Maybe you got the guts finally, let's see you prove it."

"Guedo!"

"You think I treated you rough, okay. Only I did what I had to do. You were a sloppy soldier, and I was going to straighten you out—"

"You're not helping yourself, Sergeant—"

"Sloppy! Sloppy! Guedo yelled. "You didn't know your right foot from your left! You were the lousiest soldier in my platoon. You didn't dress right, march right, shoot right. You didn't give a damn for the outfit—"

Pearson stepped back, suddenly baffled by Guedo's fury. Then Pearson know that it wasn't working out, that he wasn't getting satisfaction out of Guedo. There wasn't any fear in the Sergeant's eyes; there was only rage and disgust. He had thought to frighten Guedo into cringing, slobbering apology, but the Sergeant wasn't playing his part.

"You punk," Guedo said. "You sloppy, no-good *punk*—"

Pearson's eyes filled, blurred, and he lowered the M-1 to hip level. Then he squeezed the trigger . . .

The man in the tweed overcoat knelt down to study the remains on the carpet. Then he looked up to meet the dull eyes of the thin, sharp-faced man who stood beside the body.

"What was it?" he asked in an official tone. "Carbine?"

"M-1. He was in my outfit, in Korea."

The detective shook his head. "You vets never learn, do you? These damn souvenirs kill too many people. The poor dumb guy . . ."

He stared at the remains of the shattered weapon on the carpet.

"He never learned," Guedo said. "Never even learned to keep his rifle clean. I told him a thousand times, a dirty rifle is like a bomb. But some guys never learn," the Sergeant said.

NEXT MONTH . . .

9 new stories including

HELEN NIELSEN's	*Cop's Day Off*
NEDRA TYRE's	*A Friendly Murder*
HAROLD R. DANIEL's	*The Haunted Woodshed*

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Hugh Walpole, often referred to as the "perfect toastmaster of literature," was a remarkably prolific writer. Winner of the James Tait Black Memorial Prize twice, knighted in 1937, Mr. Walpole became a wealthy man through his writing, and collected rare manuscripts and objects of art; he was an authority on Sir Walter Scott and owned the world's largest collection of Scott manuscripts and memorabilia. It has been said of Hugh Walpole that no other author could evoke so much horror on the printed page without resorting to the supernatural. There is much truth in this judgment. For quiet distillation of terror, for the account of one of the most fiendish crimes ever conceived by the mind of man, "The Silver Mask" (dramatized by Edward Chodorov as "Kind Lady") ranks high among contemporary short stories.

THE SILVER MASK

by HUGH WALPOLE

MISS SONIA HERRIES, COMING home from a dinner party at the Westons', heard a voice at her elbow.

"If you please—only a moment—"

She had walked from the Westons' flat because it was only three streets away, and now she was only a few steps from her door; but it was late, there was no one about, and the King's Road rattle was muffled and dim.

"I am afraid I can't—" she began. It was cold and the wind nipped her cheeks.

"If you would only—" he went on.

She turned and saw one of the handsomest young men possible. He was the handsome young man of all romantic stories, tall, dark, pale, slim, distinguished—oh, everything!—and he was wearing a shabby blue suit and shivering with the cold just as he should have been.

"I'm afraid I can't—" she repeated, beginning to move on.

"Oh, I know," he interrupted quickly. "Everyone says the same and quite naturally. I should if our positions were reversed. But I *must* go on with it. I *can't* go back to my wife and baby with simply nothing. We have no fire, no food, nothing except the ceiling we are under. It is my fault, all of it. I don't want your pity, but I *have* to attack your comfort."

He trembled. He shivered as

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though he were going to fall. Involuntarily she put out her hand to steady him. She touched his arm and felt it quiver under the thin sleeve.

"It's all right . . ." he murmured. "I'm hungry . . . I can't help it."

She had had an excellent dinner. She had drunk perhaps just enough to lead to recklessness—in any case, before she realized it, she was ushering him in, through her dark-blue painted door. A crazy thing to do! Nor was it as though she were too young to know any better, for she was fifty if she was a day and although sturdy of body and as strong as a horse (except for a little unsteadiness of the heart), intelligent enough to be thin, neurotic, and abnormal; but she was none of these.

Although intelligent, she suffered dreadfully from impulsive kindness. All her life she had done so. The mistakes that she had made—and there had been quite a few—had all arisen from the triumph of her heart over her brain. She knew it—how well she knew it!—and all her friends were forever dinning it into her. When she reached her fiftieth birthday she said to herself—"Well, now at last I'm too old to be foolish any more." And here she was, helping an entirely unknown young man into her house at dead of night, and he in all probability the worst sort of criminal.

Very soon he was sitting on her rose-colored sofa, eating sandwiches and drinking a whiskey and soda. He seemed to be entirely overcome by the beauty of her possessions. "If he's acting he's doing it very well," she thought to herself. But he had taste and he had knowledge.

He knew that the Utrillo was an early one, the only period of importance in that master's work; he knew that the two old men talking under a window belonged to Sickert's "Middle Italian"; he recognized the Dobson head and the wonderful green bronze elk of Carl Milles.

"You are an artist," she said. "You paint?"

"No, I am a beggar, a thief, a what you like—anything bad," he answered fiercely. "And now I must go," he added, springing up from the sofa.

He seemed most certainly invigorated. She could scarcely believe that he was the same young man who only half an hour before had had to lean on her arm for support. And he was a gentleman. Of that there could be no sort of question. And he was astoundingly beautiful in the spirit of a hundred years ago, a young Byron, a young Shelley, not a young Ramon Novarro or a young Ronald Colman.

Well, it was better that he should go, and she did hope (for his own sake rather than hers) that he would not demand money and threaten a scene. After all, with her snow-white hair, firm broad chin,

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firm broad body, she did not look like someone who could be threatened. He had not apparently the slightest intention of threatening her. He moved towards the door.

"Oh!" he murmured with a little gasp of wonder. He had stopped before one of the loveliest things that she had—a mask in silver of a clown's face, the clown smiling, gay, joyful, not hinting at perpetual sadness as all clowns are traditionally supposed to do. It was one of the most successful efforts of the famous Sorat, greatest living master of masks.

"Yes. Isn't that lovely?" she said. "It was one of Sorat's earliest things, and still, I think, one of his best."

"Silver is the right material for that clown," he said.

"Yes, I think so too," she agreed. She realized that she had asked him nothing about his troubles, about his poor wife and baby, about his past history. It was better perhaps like this.

"You have saved my life," he said to her in the hall. She had in her hand a pound note.

"Well," she answered cheerfully, "I was a fool to risk a strange man in my house at this time of night—But such an old woman like me—where's the risk?"

"I could have cut your throat," he said quite seriously.

"So you could," she admitted. "But with horrid consequences to yourself."

"Oh, no," he said. "Not in these days. The police are never able to catch anybody."

"Well, good night. Do take this. It can get you some warmth at least."

He took the pound. "Thanks," he said carelessly. Then at the door he remarked, "That mask. The loveliest thing I ever saw."

When the door had closed and she went back into the sitting room she sighed, "What a good-looking young man!"

Then she saw that her most beautiful white jade cigarette case was gone. It had been lying on the little table by the sofa. She had seen it just before she went into the pantry to cut the sandwiches. He had stolen it.

She looked everythwere. No, undoubtedly he had stolen it.

"What a good-looking young man!" she thought as she went up to bed.

Sonia Herries was a woman of her time in that outwardly she was cynical and destructive while inwardly she was a creature longing for affection and appreciation. For though she had white hair and was fifty, she was outwardly active, young, could do with little sleep and less food, could dance and drink cocktails and play bridge to the end of all time.

Inwardly she cared for neither cocktails nor bridge. She was above all things maternal and she had a weak heart, not only a spiritual

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weak heart but also a physical one. When she suffered, must take her drops, lie down and rest, she allowed no one to see her. Like all the other women of her period and manner of life she had a courage worthy of a better cause.

She was a heroine for no reason at all.

But beyond everything else, she was maternal. Twice at least she would have married had she loved enough, but the man she had really loved had not loved her—that was twenty-five years ago; so she had pretended to despise matrimony. Had she had a child her nature would have been fulfilled; as she had not had that good fortune she had been maternal, with outward cynical indifference, to numbers of people who had made use of her, sometimes laughed at her, never deeply cared for her.

She was named "a jolly good sort," and was always "just outside" the real life of her friends. Her Herries relations, Rockages and Cards and Newmarks, used her to take odd places at table, to fill up spare rooms at house parties, to make purchases for them in London, to talk to when things went wrong with them or people abused them. She was a very lonely woman.

She saw her young thief for the second time a fortnight later. She saw him because he came to her house one evening when she was dressing for dinner.

"A young man at the door," said her maid Rose.

"A young man? Who?" But she knew.

"I don't know, Miss Sonia. He won't give his name."

She came down and found him in the hall, the cigarette case in his hand. He was wearing a decent suit of clothes, but he still looked hungry, haggard, desperate, and incredibly handsome. She took him into the room where they had been before. He gave her the cigarette case.

"I pawned it," he said, his eyes on the silver mask.

"What a disgraceful thing to do!" she said. "And what are you going to steal next?"

"My wife made some money last week," he said. "That will see us through for a while."

"Do you never do any work?" she asked him.

"I paint," he answered. "But no one will touch my pictures. They are not modern enough."

"You must show me some of your pictures," she said, and realized how weak she was. It was not his good looks that gave him his power over her, but something both helpless and defiant, like a wicked child who hates his mother but is always coming to her for help.

"I have some here," he said, went into the hall, and returned with several canvases. He displayed them. They were very bad—sugary land-

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scapes and sentimental figures.

"They are very bad," she said.

"I know they are. You must understand that my esthetic taste is very fine. I appreciate only the best things in art like your cigarette case, that mask there, the Utrillo. But I can paint nothing but these. It is very exasperating." He smiled at her.

"Won't you buy one?" he asked her.

"Oh, but I don't want one," she answered. "I should have to hide it." She was aware that in ten minutes her guests would be here.

"Oh, do buy one."

"No, but of course not—"

"Yes, please." He came nearer and looked up into her broad kindly face like a beseeching child.

"Well . . . how much are they?"

"This is twenty pounds. This twenty-five—"

"But how absurd! They are not worth anything at all."

"They may be one day. You never know with modern pictures."

"I am quite sure about these."

"Please buy one. That one with the cows is not so bad."

She sat down and wrote a check.

"I'm a perfect fool. Take this, and understand I never want to see you again. Never! You will never be admitted. It is no use speaking to me in the street. If you bother me I shall tell the police."

He took the check with quiet satisfaction, held out his hand, and pressed hers a little.

"Hang that in the right light and it will not be so bad—"

"You want new boots," she said. "Those are terrible."

"I shall be able to get some now," he said and went away.

All that evening, while she listened to the hard and crackling ironies of her friends, she thought of the young man. She did not know his name. The only thing that she knew about him was that by his own confession he was a scoundrel and had at his mercy a poor young wife and a starving child. The picture that she formed of these three haunted her.

It had been, in a way, honest of him to return the cigarette case. Ah, but he knew, of course, that did he not return it he could never have seen her again. He had discovered at once that she was a splendid source of supply, and now that she had bought one of his wretched pictures—

Nevertheless he could not be altogether bad. No one who cared so passionately for beautiful things could be quite worthless. The way that he had gone straight to the silver mask as soon as he entered the room and gazed at it as though with his very soul!

And sitting at her dinner table, uttering the most cynical sentiments, she was all softness as she gazed across to the wall upon whose pale surface the silver mask was hanging. There was, she thought, a certain look of the young

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man in that jolly shining surface. But where? The clown's cheek was fat, his mouth broad, his lips thick —and yet, and yet—

For the next few days as she went about London she looked in spite of herself at the passersby to see whether he might not be there. One thing she soon discovered, that he was very much more handsome than anyone else whom she saw. But it was not for his handsomeness that he haunted her. It was because he wanted her to be kind to him, and because she wanted—oh, so terribly—to be kind to someone!

The silver mask, she had the fancy, was gradually changing, the rotundity thinning, some new light coming into the empty eyes. It was most certainly a beautiful thing.

Then, as unexpectedly as on the other occasions, he appeared again. One night as she, back from a theatre, smoking one last cigarette, was preparing to climb the stairs to bed, there was a knock on the door. Everyone, of course, rang the bell—no one attempted the old-fashioned knocker shaped like an owl that she had bought, one idle day, in an old curiosity shop.

Rose had gone to bed, so she went herself to the door. There he was—and with him a young girl and a baby. They all came into the sitting room and stood awkwardly by the fire. It was at that moment when she saw them in a group by the fire that she felt her first sharp pang of fear.

She knew suddenly how weak she was—she seemed to be turned to water at sight of them—she, Sonia Herries, fifty years of age, independent and strong, save for that little flutter of the heart—yes, turned to water! She was afraid as though someone had whispered a warning in her ear.

The girl was striking, with red hair and a white face, a thin graceful little thing. The baby, wrapped in a shawl, was soaked in sleep. She gave them drinks and the remainder of the sandwiches that had been put there for herself. The young man looked at her with his charming smile.

"We haven't come to cadge anything this time," he said. "But I wanted you to see my wife and I wanted her to see some of your lovely things."

"Well," she said sharply. "You can only stay a minute or two. It's late. I'm off to bed. Besides, I told you not to come here again."

"Ada made me," he said, nodding at the girl. "She was so very anxious to see you."

The girl never said a word but only stared sulkily in front of her.

"All right. But you must go soon. By the way, you've never told me your name."

"Henry Abbott, and that's Ada, and the baby's called Henry too."

"All right. How have you been getting on since I saw you?"

"Oh, fine! Living on the fat of the land." But he soon fell into si-

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lence and the girl never said a word.

After an intolerable pause Sonia Herries suggested that they should go. They didn't move.

Half an hour later she insisted. They got up. But standing by the door, Henry Abbott jerked his head towards the writing desk.

"Who writes your letters for you?"

"Nobody. I write them myself."

"You ought to have somebody. Save a lot of trouble. I'll do them for you."

"Oh, no, thank you. That would never do. Well, good night, good night—"

"Of course I'll do them for you. And you needn't pay me anything either. Fill up my time."

"Nonsense . . . good night, good night." She closed the door on them.

She could not sleep. She lay there thinking of him. She was moved, partly by a maternal tenderness for them that warmed her body—the girl and the baby had looked so helpless sitting there—partly by a shiver of apprehension that chilled her veins.

Well, she hoped that she would never see them again. Or did she? Would she not tomorrow, as she walked down Sloane Street, stare at everyone to see whether by chance that was he?

Three mornings later he arrived.

It was a wet morning and she had decided to devote it to the settling of accounts. She was sitting there at her table when Rose showed him in.

"I've come to do your letters," he said.

"I should think not," she said sharply. "Now, Henry Abbott, out you go. I've had enough—"

"Oh, no, you haven't," he said, and sat down at her desk.

She would be ashamed forever, but half an hour later she was seated in the corner of the sofa telling him what to write. She hated to confess it to herself, but she liked to see him sitting there. He was company for her, and to whatever depths he might by now have sunk, he was most certainly a gentleman. He behaved very well that morning; he wrote an excellent hand. He seemed to know just what to say.

A week later she said, laughing, to Amy Weston, "My dear, would you believe it? I've had to take on a secretary. A very good-looking young man—but you needn't look down your nose. You know that good-looking young men are nothing to *me*—and he does save me endless bother."

For three weeks he behaved very well, arriving punctually, offering her no insults, doing as she suggested about everything.

In the fourth week, about a quarter to one on a day, his wife arrived. On this occasion she looked astonishingly young, sixteen perhaps. She wore a simple gray cot-

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ton dress. Her red bobbed hair was strikingly vibrant about her pale face.

The young man already knew that Miss Herries was lunching alone. He had seen the table laid for one with its simple appurtenances. It seemed to be very difficult not to ask them to remain. She did, although she did not wish to.

The meal was not a success. The two of them together were tiresome, for the man said little when his wife was there, and the woman said nothing at all. Also, the pair of them were in a way sinister.

She sent them away after luncheon. They departed without protest. But as she walked, engaged on her shopping that afternoon, she decided that she must rid herself of them, once and for all. It was true that it had been rather agreeable having him there; his smile, his wicked humorous remarks, the suggestion that he was a kind of malevolent gamin who preyed on the world in general but spared her because he liked her—all this had attracted her; but what really alarmed her was that during all these weeks he had made no request for money. He must have some plan in his head with which one morning he would balefully startle her!

For a moment there in the bright sunlight, with the purr of the traffic, the rustle of the trees about her, she saw herself in surprising color. She was behaving with a weakness that was astonishing. Her stout, thick-set, resolute body, her cheery rosy face, her strong white hair—all these disappeared, and in their place, almost clinging for support to the Park railings, was a timorous little old woman with frightened eyes and trembling knees.

What was there to be afraid of? She had done nothing wrong. There were the police at hand. She had never been a coward before. She went home, however, with an odd impulse to leave her comfortable little house in Walpole Street and hide herself somwehere —somewhere that no one could discover.

That evening they appeared again, husband, wife, and baby. She had settled herself down for a cosy evening with a book and an "early to bed." There came the knock on the door.

On this occasion she was most certainly firm with them. When they were gathered in a little group she got up and addressed them.

"Here is five pounds," she said, "and this is the end. If one of you shows his or her face inside this door again I call the police. Now go."

The girl gave a little gasp and fell in a dead faint at her feet. It was a perfectly genuine faint. Rose was summoned. Everything possible was done.

"She has simply not had enough to eat," said Henry Abbott.

In the end—so determined and

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resolved was the faint—Ada Abbott was put to bed in the spare room and a doctor was summoned. After examining her he said that she needed rest and nourishment.

This was perhaps the critical moment of the whole affair. Had Sonia Herries been at this crisis properly resolute and bundled the Abbott family, faint and all, into the cold unsympathizing street, she might at this moment be a hale and hearty old woman enjoying bridge with her friends. It was, however, just here that her maternal temperament was too strong for her.

The poor young thing lay exhausted, her eyes closed, her cheeks almost the color of her pillow. The baby—surely the quietest baby ever known—lay in a cot beside the bed. Henry Abbott wrote letters to dictation downstairs. Once Sonia Herries, glancing up at the silver mask, was struck by the grin on the clown's face. It seemed to her now a thin sharp grin—almost derisive.

Three days after Ada Abbott's collapse there arrived her aunt and her uncle, Mr. and Mrs. Edwards. Mr. Edwards was a large red-faced man with a hearty manner and a bright waistcoat. He looked like a publican. Mrs. Edwards was a thin sharp-nosed woman with a bass voice. She was very, very thin, and wore a large old-fashioned brooch on her flat but emotional chest.

They sat side by side on the sofa and explained that they had come to inquire after Ada, their favorite niece. Mrs. Edwards cried, Mr. Edwards was friendly and familiar. Unfortunately, Mrs. Weston and a friend came and called just then. They did not stay very long. They were frankly amazed at the Edwards couple and deeply startled by Henry Abbott's familiarity. Sonia Herries could see that they drew the very worst conclusions.

A week later Ada Abbott was still in bed in the upstairs room. It seemed to be impossible to move her. The Edwardses were constant visitors. On one occasion they brought Mr. and Mrs. Harper and their girl Agnes. They were profusely apologetic, but Miss Herries would understand that "with the interest they took in Ada it was impossible to stay passive." They all crowded into the spare bedroom and gazed at the pale figure with the closed eyes sympathetically.

Then two things happened together. Rose gave notice and Mrs. Weston came and had a frank talk with her friend. She began with that most sinister opening: "I think you ought to know, dear, what everyone is saying—" What everyone was saying was that Sonia Herries was living with a young ruffian from the streets, young enough to be her son.

"You must get rid of them all and at once," said Mrs. Weston, "or you won't have a friend left in London, darling."

Left to herself, Sonia Herries did what she had not done for years:

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she burst into tears. What had happened to her? Not only had her will and determination gone but she felt most unwell. Her heart was bad again; she could not sleep; the house, too, was tumbling to pieces. There was dust over everything. How was she ever to replace Rose?

She was living in some horrible nightmare. This dreadful handsome young man seemed to have some authority over her. Yet he did not threaten her. All he did was to smile. Nor was she in the very least in love with him. This must come to an end or she would be lost.

Two days later, at tea-time, her opportunity arrived. Mr. and Mrs. Edwards had called to see how Ada was; Ada was downstairs at last, very weak and pale. Henry Abbott was there, also the baby. Sonia Herries, although she was feeling dreadfully unwell, addressed them all with vigor. She especially addressed the sharp-nosed Mrs. Edwards.

"You must understand," she said. "I don't want to be unkind, but I have my own life to consider. I am a very busy woman, and this has all been forced on me. I don't want to seem brutal. I'm glad to have been of some assistance to you, but I think Mrs. Abbott is well enough to go home now—and I wish you all good night."

"I am sure," said Mrs. Edwards, looking up at her from the sofa, "that you've been kindness itself, Miss Herries. Ada recognizes it, I'm sure. But to move her now would be to kill her, that's all. Any movement and she'll drop at your feet."

"We have nowhere to go," said Henry Abbott.

"But Mrs. Edwards—" began Miss Herries, her anger rising.

"We have only two rooms," said Mrs. Edwards quietly. "I'm sorry, but just now, what with my husband coughing all night—"

"Oh, but this is monstrous!" Miss Herries cried. "I have had enough of this. I have been generous to a degree—"

"What about my pay," said Henry, "for all these weeks?"

"Pay! Why, of course—" Miss Herries began. Then she stopped. She realized several things. She realized that she was alone in the house, the cook having departed that afternoon. She realized that none of them had moved. She realized that her "things"—the Sickert, the Utrillo, the sofa—were alive with apprehension.

She was fearfully frightened of their silence, their immobility. She moved towards her desk, and her heart turned, squeezed itself dry, shot through her body the most dreadful agony.

"Please," she gasped. "In the drawer—the little green bottle—oh, quick! Please, please!"

The last thing of which she was aware was the quiet handsome features of Henry Abbott bending over her.

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When, a week later, Mrs. Weston called, the girl, Ada Abbott, opened the door to her.

"I came to inquire for Miss Herries," she said. "I haven't seen her about. I have telephoned several times and received no answer."

"Miss Herries is very ill."

"Oh, I'm so sorry. Can I not see her?"

Ada Abbott's quiet gentle tones were reassuring her. "The doctor does not wish her to see anyone at present. May I have your address? I will let you know as soon as she is well enough."

Mrs. Weston went away. She recounted the event. "Poor Sonia, she's pretty bad. They seem to be looking after her. As soon as she's better we'll go and see her."

The London life moves swiftly. Sonia Herries had never been of very great importance to anyone. Herries relations inquired. They received a very polite note assuring them that so soon as she was better—

Sonia Herries was in bed, but not in her own room. She was in the little attic bedroom lately occupied by Rose the maid. She lay at first in a strange apathy. She was ill. She slept and woke and slept again.

Ada Abbott, sometimes Mrs. Edwards, sometimes a woman she did not know, attended to her. They were all very kind. Did she need a doctor? No, of course she did not need a doctor, they assured her. They would see to her.

Then life began to flow back into her. Why was she in this room? Where were her friends? What was this horrible food that they were bringing her? What were they doing here, these women?

She had a terrible scene with Ada Abbott. She tried to get out of bed. The girl restrained her—and easily, for all the strength seemed to have gone from her bones. She protested; she was as furious as her weakness allowed her, then she cried. She cried most bitterly.

Next day she was alone and she crawled out of bed; the door was locked; she beat on it. There was no sound but her beating. Her heart was beginning again that terrible strangled throb.

She crept back into bed. She lay there, weakly, feebly crying. When Ada arrived with some bread, some soup, some water, she demanded that the door should be unlocked, that she should get up, have her bath, come downstairs to her own room.

"You are not well enough," Ada said gently.

"Of course I am well enough. When I get out I will have you put in prison for this—"

"Please don't get excited. It is so bad for your heart."

Mrs. Edwards and Ada washed her. She had not enough to eat. She was always hungry.

Summer had come. Mrs. Weston went to Etretat. Everyone was out of town.

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"What's happened to Sonia Herries?" Mabel Newmark wrote to Agatha Benson. "I haven't seen her for ages . . ."

But no one had time to inquire. There were so many things to do. Sonia was a good sort, but she had been nobody's business . . .

Once Henry Abbott paid her a visit. "I am so sorry that you are not better," he said smiling. "We are doing everything we can for you. It is lucky we were around when you were so ill. You had better sign these papers. Someone must look after your affairs until you are better. You will be downstairs in a week or two."

Looking at him with wide-open terrified eyes, Sonia Herries signed the papers.

The first rains of autumn lashed the streets. In the sitting room the gramophone was turned on. Ada and young Mr. Jackson, Maggie Trent and stout Harry Bennett were dancing. All the furniture was flung against the walls. Mr. Edwards drank his beer; Mrs. Edwards was toasting her toes before the fire.

Henry Abbott came in. He had just sold the Utrillo. His arrival was greeted with cheers.

He took the silver mask from the wall and went upstairs. He climbed to the top of the house, entered, switched on the naked light.

"Oh! Who—What—?" A voice of terror came from the bed.

"It's all right," he said soothingly. "Ada will be bringing your tea in a minute.

He had a hammer and nail and hung the silver mask on the speckled, mottled wallpaper where Miss Herries could see it.

"I know you're fond of it," he said. "I thought you'd like it to look at."

She only stared.

"You'll want something to look at," he went on. "You're too ill, I'm afraid, ever to leave this room again. So it'll be nice for you. Something to look at."

He went out, gently closing the door behind him.

NEXT MONTH . . .

13 stories including

CRAIG RICE's — *Malone and the Missing Weapon*

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EDITORS' FILE CARD

AUTHOR: **LLOYD BIGGLE, JR.**

TITLE: ***Music To Murder By***

TYPE: Detective Story

DETECTIVE: Maestro Alberto Marcelli

LOCALE: Maryville, United States

TIME: The Present

COMMENTS: *The orchestra conductor was faced with ruin. He asked himself: "Why cannot I do this thing?" And so Maestro Marcelli became a detective—indeed, a specialist-expert!*

ON THE STAGE OF THE MARYVILLE High School auditorium, half of the orchestra was filtering out from the wings, moving awkwardly through the stubby forest of music stands. The musicians who were already seated guarded their instruments jealously, and snarled when a clumsy foot bumped into a teetering stand.

Maestro Alberto Marcelli waited offstage, gazing surreptitiously out at the audience. The hall was filled to the overflowing, with standees arranged along the rear wall on both the main floor and the balcony, and crowding part way down the aisles. It was an appreciative audience, and a reasonably attentive one. It had received Weber's *Oberon Overture* with rousing enthusiasm. It had accorded generous applause to Marcelli's own composition, *Miniatures for Orchestra.*

Now it set up a subdued hubbub of chatter while it waited, and Marcelli was in doubt as to whether this was critical commentary on his *Miniatures,* or expectation over the symphony to follow. Or perhaps gossip over what young man was escorting what young lady.

But the concert was well on its way to being a distinguished success. Marcelli waited restlessly while the oboe's "A" sounded, a little sharp, through the orchestra, and the musicians went through the perfunctory motions of retuning their instruments. Then he carefully straightened his tie, arranged his face in a dignified smile, and

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strode forth to a tumult of applause. After the customary bows he mounted the podium, and after a histrionic pause brought his baton down on the opening measures of Schubert's *Unfinished Symphony.*

This composition is, as the program notes informed the good citizens of Maryville, a "translucent masterpiece of sheer tonal beauty, with moods that storm the heights of intense melancholy, ingratiating rhythms, and melodies of breathtaking loveliness." Early in the first movement oboe and clarinet play one of these melodies in unison above a shimmering background supplied by the strings, and in the hands of two skilled performers the instruments blend to produce a strangely beautiful, other-worldly tone quality that is both clarinet and oboe, and at the same time mysteriously neither.

Marcelli did not bother to cue the two woodwinds. As he well knew, veteran musicians tend to regard a cue as a veiled insult. He kept his attention on the strings. One thirty-second of a beat later he sincerely regretted his overconfidence. The tone that he heard was not the Schubertian blend of clarinet and oboe, but the round fullness of a clarinet playing alone.

Marcelli whirled and stared down at the woodwind section. His first oboe player leaned forward, half hidden by his music rack, looking comically like an amateur musician who had lost his place and hoped to shield himself from the wrath of the conductor. The oboe lay horizontally across his lap, and handsome blond curls glistened resplendently in the glow of the music rack light.

The startled second oboe player caught the melody in its third measure, cancelling out the cursed purity of the clarinet tone, but Marcelli was not satisfied. He leaned out over the orchestra, and whispered, "Richards!"

There was no response.

Marcelli could not recall, afterward, if he actually sensed that something was wrong, or if he was merely outraged at the spectacle of one of his highest paid musicians sleeping during a concert. In an unprecedented action he lowered his baton, and brought the music to a halt.

A restrained murmur of excitement arose from the audience as the conductor edged his way back through the orchestra, brushing against music racks, stepping on protruding toes, and getting himself prodded by a flute. He bent over the dormant oboe player and said testily, "Richards! Are you all right, Richards?"

Richards did not respond Marcelli shook him, searched his white shirt front for a heart beat, and found none. The dark of Richards' black coat was stained a darker black, and Marcelli's hand encountered a most uncomfortably moist stickiness when he touched it.

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Marcelli made his way back to the podium, and faced the audience. "We need a doctor," he said apologetically. "And, I think, a policeman."

By midnight Alberto Marcelli had developed a roaring, throbbing monstrosity of a headache. He first noticed it during an argument with the Maryville Chief of Police over whether the concert should be continued. Marcelli won the argument with the support of the Mayor, who fortunately was a member of the audience, and therefore understood Marcelli's point that people who paid money for a concert should have a concert. Marcelli was allowed to finish the program, though the police cancelled the intermission.

The headache intensified as the evening progressed. Ted Schwartz, the second oboe player, took the first oboe part and shattered Marcelli's nerves by blowing sharp in the lovely oboe solo at bar 84 of the Schubert second movement. The musicians were edgy, which was perhaps understandable but none the less disconcerting. The string playing was ragged, the brass missed entrances, the woodwinds phrased like badly trained amateurs.

And then, as soon as the concert was over, the swarms of police, the questions—merciful heavens, the questions! And now it was midnight, and there was the baggage to look after, and a train that must be taken, and these important gentlemen wanted only to sit on the auditorium stage and *talk*.

The musicians were scattered widely about the auditorium, singly, in twos, in small groups, looking tired but resigned. They had been searched; their instruments had been confiscated and handled roughly; they had been questioned and called back for more questions; measurements had been chalked off on the stage. Marcelli had watched all this in the vague certainty that progress was being made, but nothing had happened or seemed likely to happen.

He pressed his fists sharply into his pounding forehead and tried not to listen to what the policemen were saying.

"Witnesses! Usually you have to work to find one. Here we have 1,736 of 'em, not counting the orchestra, and not one of 'em saw anything."

"At least we know it has to be one of the musicians. That narrows it down . . ."

". . . twenty-five good suspects within a radius of thirty feet, and every one of them hated his guts."

Marcelli sighed. It was true. Richards was a wonderful musician, but a—what would the Americans call him?—a louse. He insulted people. He cheated at cards. He had an unfortunately handsome face and he pursued the women musicians, married or single. Marcelli had

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many times thought of letting him go, but wonderful oboe players were so few and so difficult to find.

"Hey, Maestro!"

It was the tall, slender man, the one with the military title—was it captain or colonel?—and the queer name. Rinkle. One would expect it to have that inexplicable English spelling, wrinkle, but it did not.

"We want to go over this again," Rinkle said. "You started out playing this overture. Then part of the orchestra left the stage. Right?"

"Yes," Marcelli said. "My *Miniatures* I score for small orchestra. One flute, one oboe, one clarinet . . ."

"You're certain Richards was alive right up to the end of that piece?"

"Of course. He plays a solo nine measures from the end of the last movement. He plays it beautifully. You think I don't know if my oboe doesn't play?"

"Then after the *Miniatures* the spare musicians came back on-stage. At least a dozen of them walked behind Richards' chair. We think it must have happened then. Now, you were standing in the wings . . ."

"Please," Marcelli said. They were all looking at him—Rinkle, and Mr. Walton, the Chief of Police, and Mr. Barnes, the Sheriff, and Mr. Nichols—no, he had another military title, Sergeant Nichols—of the State Police, and others whose name and titles Marcelli could not remember, except that young man Patrolman Seagrave, who told him he'd once played drums in a high school band. Strange that these Americans should have so many different kinds of police. But Mr. Walton said he was getting all the help he could because there were so many people to be questioned, and doubtless he knew best.

"Please," Marcelli said again, getting to his feet. "I tell you—I see nothing. I do not look at the woodwinds. And please—the train. We must take the train. The musicians I must pay, even if they don't play. We miss tomorrow's concert . . ."

"Sit down," Rinkle said.

Marcelli sat down. His headache was a grinding, exploding torment.

"I like this man Schwartz," Rinkle said. "He had a double motive. Richards was making passes at his fiancée, and with Richards out of the way Schwartz gets promoted. And he walked behind Richards when he came on stage."

Marcelli sighed, and shook his head. No. Positively no. Ted Schwartz was a nice young man, even if he did occasionally play out of tune. And Rita Adams, the harpist, was a well-behaved girl. It was all his fault, for not getting rid of Richards, and he would have to wire New York for another oboe player.

". . . six others with motives as good or better. If no one saw anything . . ."

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". . . suppose they could be covering up. The way they felt about Richards, this murderer is a hero."

The clock said twenty minutes after twelve, and still they would do nothing but talk. Richards was dead. They could not change that. He had been stabbed in the back with something long and pointed, like a large needle. These policemen hadn't found the needle, but their doctor had told them about it. One of his musicians had done it, walking behind Richards' chair and stabbing the long needle into his back, then pulling it out . . .

"This needle," Marcelli said, speaking to no one in particular. "Could it be stabbed with the fingers?"

Silence. The policemen looked at each other. "It probably had a handle on it," Rinkle said. "Like an ice pick."

Marcelli nodded, trying to visualize an ice pick. "Wouldn't that be—*large?*"

"It was a risky thing to do," Rinkle said. "But he seems to have gotten away with it, since no one saw him."

"Yes," Marcelli said. But the more he thought about it, the more unbelievable it seemed.

"I suppose we might as well knock it off," the Chief of Police said. "In the morning . . ."

So they would do nothing. They would make all his musicians stay until the next day, perhaps longer. He would have to cancel this tour he had worked so hard to book, and he would be ruined. He looked at the empty chairs on the stage, and asked himself, "Why cannot I do this thing, since they will not? I am a musician, and I know music and musicians. I can think as a musician thinks. These policemen have no music in them, except, perhaps, the young player of drums, and I think he cannot have much."

Marcelli got to his feet and walked to the rear of the stage. He beckoned to Seagrave, the ex-drummer. "Would you, please, sit where Mr. Richards sat?"

Seagrave sat down and turned uneasily, as though he expected a flying needle to strike him. Marcelli took a seat in the row of chairs behind him, where the brass players had sat. The policemen moved closer and watched.

"I am a musician," Marcelli said aloud. "I ask myself: If I, a musician, wish to murder another musician, what will I do? Where is Schwartz?"

"Schwartz!" Rinkle bellowed. The second oboe player came running.

"Schwartz," Marcelli said, "when the orchestra is back on stage after my *Miniatures,* it is you who sounds the 'A'."

Schwartz nodded.

"It is the oboe that makes the orchestra's tuning note," Marcelli explained to Rinkle. "Richards has perfect pitch. He is always perfectly in tune, and he says everyone else

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should be perfectly in tune, and all this tuning is nonsense. So he often lets Schwartz make the 'A'. Only, if Schwartz is not precisely correct he speaks sharply to him."

"He'd take my head off," Schwartz said.

"So now I remember. After the *Miniatures* you make the 'A', but you are sharp. And Richards does not speak to you. So he is already dead."

"I think I understand," Rinkle said. "Yes, that does narrow the time down a little. But those who were off-stage were already back and sitting down by then, so it really doesn't make any difference."

"Again," Marcelli said, "I ask myself: Will I murder a musician while he is playing? No. He might drop his instrument, and no musician would wish to damage a fine instrument. And people would notice. Richards has his instrument in his lap, so it happens after the *Miniatures*. He has finished playing, and he has laid down his oboe."

Rinkle was being patient. "True. That narrows it down by maybe another fifteen seconds. But we knew he wasn't killed during your *Miniatures*, because there wasn't anyone within four feet of him. On one side of him was an empty chair—Schwartz's chair. On the other side was this bassoon player, Martin, but a good four feet from him. Behind him, but not close, were those brass players, Styers, Emmet, and Frost. None of those men left their seats after the *Miniatures*. We checked. A couple of them could have reached out and possibly touched Richards, if they leaned far enough, but pushing a needle into a man's back isn't the same thing as just touching him. It takes force and leverage. We're in agreement that none of them could have done it without attracting attention. So this leaves us exactly where we were. After the *Miniatures* one of the returning musicians walked behind Richards' chair and stabbed him in the back."

"I think not," Marcelli said.

"Huh? What do you mean?"

"Be quiet, please," Marcelli said. "I must think."

His headache had lessened somewhat. He closed his eyes, trying to visualize a murderer approaching, with an instrument in one hand and an object such as this ice pick in the other.

"No," he said. "I would not do it. There is confusion, but not enough. The musicians look around, they talk, they watch each other. Someone sees this ice pick, or someone sees the stabbing. There is noise, but not enough noise. Supposing Richards does not die at once. Supposing he says—says, 'Ouch!' And how am I to hide this ice pick when the police come to search after the concert? No, I do not do it that way."

"Maybe you don't," Rinkle said. "But that's the way it must have

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been done. There isn't any other way."

Marcelli turned to Schwartz. "Is Richards alive when you return?"

"No," Schwartz said. "I'm sure he didn't move a muscle from the time I sat down until you stopped the orchestra. I tried to tell them that, and they seemed to think it proved I stabbed him."

"You're a good boy, Schwartz," Marcelli said. "You are always the first one back after the *Miniatures*. I've noticed. Only it's too bad you don't play in tune. You go sit down, now."

He looked at the circle of policemen watching him. It occurred to him that the reason they weren't doing anything but talk was that they didn't know what to do. "I must think again," he announced.

He closed his eyes and asked himself: Exactly what did happen? The orchestra finished his *Miniatures*. He turned to acknowledge the applause. Behind him there was Richards, sitting erect with his back exposed above the low-backed chair, as Seagrave was sitting now. There was Schwartz's vacant chair beside him. And Martin, the bassoon player, on his left. And behind him, the three first-chair brass players, separated by empty chairs because the others were offstage.

There was Styers, the first trumpet player, sitting where he was sitting now. He was much too far away, and the angle was impossible. The same applied to Frost, the first horn player, sitting behind and to the right of Richards. And then there was Fred Emmet, who sat directly behind Richards but with an aisle between them.

Marcelli took a deep breath, and looked at the clock. It was a quarter to one.

"All right," he said. "Now I understand. Mr. Seagrave, I would like to ask you, please, to look for something in the instrument cases."

"They've already been searched," Rinkle said.

Marcelli smiled, and whispered instructions to Seagrave. The young policeman nodded. "I have a knife," he said, and hurried away.

Rinkle watched him go, scratching his head, then summoned half a dozen men with a sweep of his hand and followed. Marcelli leaned back and watched the clock . . .

Rinkle walked in slowly. He held up a sliver of steel, five inches long, L-shaped, square at one end and tapering to a deadly point at the other. "In Schwartz's case," he said. "It was pushed in through the lining. We didn't realize how thick the lining is in those cases. Now we can wind this up. Get Schwartz."

"No!" Marcelli said sharply. "It is not Schwartz. Perhaps your murderer wants you to think it is Schwartz, or perhaps he just hides this in the first case he comes to." He turned to Seagrave. "Did you find the other?"

Seagrave nodded. "Behind a radiator."

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Marcelli took it, held it up. "This is a music lyre socket."

Rinkle said blankly, "Music lyre? Oh, you mean those little things . . ."

"Exactly. When the wind musician must stand up to play, the music lyre holds his music. It must be attached to the instrument if the musician sees the music while he plays. For this the musician needs the music lyre socket. The socket fits around the instrument, you see, just as it now fits around my finger, and the screw holds it tight. And into the opening the square end of the music lyre slides, and the other screw holds it. Now watch: see how the square end of the needle fits perfectly into the music lyre socket. So! The screw is tightened, and now the musical instrument is a deadly weapon. The needle and socket are removed in seconds and there is no evidence. Do you comprehend now?"

"No," Rinkle said. "I don't see what the devil the instrument has to do with it."

"Listen," Marcelli said. "We play my *Miniatures*. The audience applauds generously. At that moment half my musicians are off-stage, and those on the stage are seeing to their instruments, or getting music ready for the next work we perform. Or even if they look around, they are separated by empty chairs and there are music stands in the way. They can see nothing. This is when it happens. If Richards says something, or makes a sound, no one hears because the audience claps loudly. All it needs is to aim the needle well, and this is not hard when a man is sitting still. A moment later the applause stops and the other musicians come back, but by then Richards is dead."

"If you say so. But who?"

"It must be the man sitting directly behind Richards. Fred Emmet."

"Bring Emmet down here," Rinkle shouted.

Out in the auditorium, Fred Emmet got to his feet. He was a gaunt, balding, middle-aged man. He moved across to the aisle, and suddenly he bolted toward the rear of the auditorium. Men converged on him, and he halted and looked about helplessly.

Marcelli sighed. "It is a pity. He had a young wife—a lovely young woman who plays in my second violins. And Richards is a handsome man. It is a pity. And now I must telegraph to New York for three musicians, because I doubt that Mrs. Emmet . . ." He stared at the clock. "The train! If we go now there is yet time. May we go?"

"Sure, you can go," Rinkle said. "Some of you may have to come back for the trial, but you can go. But I want to know one thing. How the devil did he do it? Emmet was sitting at least four feet behind Richards, and we know Emmet never left his chair."

Marcelli smiled. His headache

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had vanished. "You have no music in you," he said. "Myself, I have the music, but I am tired. I think about the train. I do not think at all about how this happens until it is almost too late. But when I think, I see at once what any musician must see.

"I see Emmet, playing the last note of my *Miniatures*. The music lyre socket is attached to his instrument—not where it must be if he is to use the music lyre, but down at the end. The music stops. The audience applauds. I, the conductor, who could perhaps see what happens from my podium—I step down and turn around and face the audience. Emmet fastens the needle, which he makes out of a music lyre, into the socket as I turn. He pushes his stand a few inches to one side. In front of him is the back of the man he hates. Emmet does not need to leave his chair. He has only to lean forward a little. He aims—he aims his trombone—and with one long thrust he drives the needle into Richards' back."

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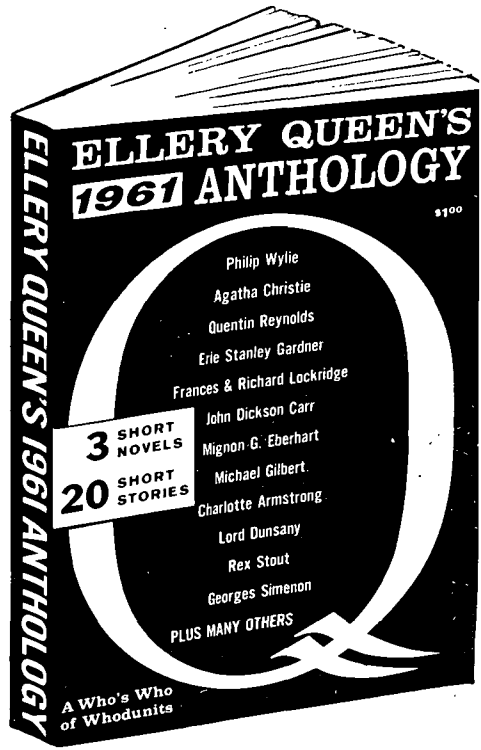

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